

Lived Experiences: An Exploration of Teachers' Thoughts and Feelings While  
Implementing an Antibullying Initiative

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study explored elementary school teachers' lived experiences and perceptions surrounding the implementation of an antibullying program within the public school system.

The purpose of this study was to share the individual stories of teachers who have implemented an antibullying initiative and how their journey into the bullying phenomenon changed their personal beliefs, their students, and their school climate. Five elementary school teachers (3 female, 2 male) from 5 different public schools in a southwestern region of Ontario completed 8 closed-ended questions and participated in 1-on-1 semistructured interviews. All 5 teachers had implemented the "Imagine...A School Without Bullying" initiative or were involved with its predecessor the "Good Kid Sid" pilot project. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The data were coded, and broad themes were reduced to a smaller number of topics where a more in-depth analysis occurred.

Findings showed that reports of bullying existed at each of the schools. All 5 teachers felt their initiative was making a positive difference in their school; however this did not come without some resistance from staff. A common finding heard from all of their stories was the need for more time. Implications for antibullying initiatives are discussed, and advice to anyone beginning an antibullying initiative is offered by each of the 5 teachers involved in this study.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This qualitative case study explores elementary school teachers' lived experiences and perceptions surrounding the implementation of an antibullying program within the public school system.

*I still remember the Good Kid Sid barbecue. There was not a cloud in the sky. It was a fantastic night, a night when the staff, students, their families and members of the community gathered together to celebrate the completion of a 3-year antibullying pilot project.*

*There were staff members positioned behind the barbecues cooking hot dogs, by the tables ensuring we never ran out of ketchup, mustard, and relish, and in amongst the crowd organizing lines and handing out cups. Large yellow coolers filled with orange pop sat on tables, and children ran around the tarmac with orange smiles. Music played in the background; families enjoyed their dinner on the grass and then played some of the co-operative games that had become part of life at our school. There was also some live entertainment, a few brief speeches, and then the finale, the cake.*

*It wasn't your ordinary cake; it was two huge slabs of chocolate and vanilla cake covered with an icing picture of Good Kid Sid, the icon representing our antibullying pilot project. The line-ups were long, but everyone received a piece of cake. The best part, for me, was that the staff, students, and their family members knew what we were celebrating. Okay, maybe not everyone, but our staff and most of our students and their families recognized the icon and knew what the Good Kid Sid initiative was about. It was quite an accomplishment. Teachers, students, and their families with varying attitudes, beliefs, and experiences coming together to implement a program to help the students at*



*our school understand and deal with bullying. As I scanned the tarmac I was seeing the results of our 3 years of hard work. I was looking at a group of students who were aware of what bullying is and what they can do when they encounter it. I was also looking at an amazing group of teachers who had overcome bullying myths and decided on what constitutes bullying at our school. These teachers became informed about bullying and created a common language for themselves and the students to use when dealing with bullying. These teachers gave students at our school the knowledge and the tools to use when addressing incidents of bullying.*

*We made a difference in the lives of the children we encountered over the past 3 years. We made a decision to educate ourselves, to dispel any myths we once held to be truths, and to tackle bullying in our school. We accomplished this goal. It is only the beginning. There is still a lot of work to be done, but this story is one that I will take with me throughout my journey as a teacher.*

### **Introduction**

It's a normal part of growing up! Nice girls don't do that! Boys will be boys! These phrases are familiar to everyone, and often believed as true. Children are being raised to believe the messages embedded in the above myths. In a time when bullying has resurfaced and schools are looking at ways to prevent violence, students of all ages continue to use various forms of violence to hurt or gain power over their peers. By not acknowledging bullying as a form of aggression or violence, we allow it to exist in our schools, our homes, and our communities.

The media has inundated the public with accounts of tragedies involving children and bullying episodes. The incident at Columbine High School in the United States is

one glaring example. Two victims of bullying turned the tables and became the aggressors. They shot staff and students at their high school before turning their guns on themselves. This horrific tragedy, resulting from bullying, is not isolated in the United States. More than 2 decades ago, Norway officials reported the suicides of three young boys as a result of bullying (Olweus, 1993). In the past decade, England, Japan, and Australia have all reported suicides as a result of bullying (Rigby, 1998).

Canada has experienced a school shooting (Taber, Alberta, Canada), beatings resulting in death, and several suicides, all as a result of peer bullying and victimization. A few of these cases have received a considerable amount of high-profile attention in our courts (Pepler, Craig, O'Connell, Atlas, & Charach, 2004). In 2002 the courts in the provinces of British Columbia and Nova Scotia handed out convictions to girls for "uttering threats" which the courts felt played a role in the suicides of fellow peers (Leadbeater, Dhami, Hoglund, & Boone, 2004). Citing examples of similar tragedies highlights the issue, but it does not help address or begin to solve the problem of peer bullying and victimization. Pepler (2006) states that over the past 2 decades, in Canada, awareness regarding bullying and its harmful effects have slowly increased, but the actual incidents of bullying have not decreased. Bullying continues to be a problem in Canada. Children's lives have been lost, and many more children continue to suffer as a result of bullying. Research has shown that children tend to use covert forms of bullying in the presence of adults/teachers (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000). These findings imply that children are suffering the consequences of bullying, and we, as adults, are often unaware. What is being done to bring an end to peer bullying and victimization within our school communities?

The Education Act of Ontario (1990) is one piece of legislation that makes legal regulations in regards to the environments within schools across Ontario. When this research began, the Education Act clearly stated that “school boards must ensure that every elementary and secondary school has a code of behaviour approved by the board that communicates to all members of the school community the types of behaviours expected by them” (p. 1249). Another piece of legislation is the *Ontario Schools Code of Conduct* (Ministry of Education and Training, 2000). Section 301. (1) of the Education Act allows the Minister to create a code of conduct. The premise of this document, *Ontario Schools Code of Conduct*, is that all persons in the school environment have the right to feel safe. Safety includes the right to be treated with respect. The Code of Conduct clearly outlines guidelines for the physical safety of all school members. No weapons, alcohol, or drugs will be permitted on the school premises and conflicts will be resolved using peaceful means. The Code of Conduct clearly outlines the standards of behaviour expected within our schools and the consequences for not adhering to the expectations. One of the guiding principles in the document is that nonviolent solutions are sought when resolving conflicts, although one has to go back to the *Violence-Free Schools Policy* (Ministry of Education and Training, 1994) to see the term bullying printed clearly in the legislation. This document states that bullying will not be tolerated in any school community.

While I worked to complete my research on antibullying initiatives, the Ministry of Education made changes to their policies regarding bullying and its offenders. As of February 1, 2008 the Education Act will now recognize bullying as an offence that may warrant suspension, if deemed appropriate (Ministry of Education and Training, 2007).

The inclusion of bullying on the list of infractions that may lead to suspension means the Ministry of Education believes bullying is a problem facing students in our schools. This new legislation sends a clear message that students who bully will not be permitted in our schools. The legislation also includes *Policy and Program Memorandum Number 144* (PPM 144), which “requires boards to develop and implement policies on bullying prevention and intervention by February 1, 2008,” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2007, p. 5). This new legislation was not in place when my research was conducted. However, the components of this new legislation, specifically PPM 144, and what it means for staff and students will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Legislating the safety of the students within our schools is the initial step. However, the education, creation, promotion, and enforcement of a safety policy within a school is where the work really begins. Do teachers know what constitutes bullying? Have they received enough training to handle incidents of bullying? Boulton’s (1997) research states that the way in which teachers define bullying is important to their role in the intervention. If teachers do not know what to look for in regards to bullying, how can they effectively intervene? Bosacki, Marini, and Dane (2006) found students still report bullying incidents to teachers as a means of prevention. By offering preservice and in-service training, teachers will gain the necessary information regarding school bullying and its prevention (Holt & Keyes, 2004).

Prior to the new legislation, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training had published some documents that may have assisted teachers in addressing bullying, social skills, and violence in their classrooms. *Choices into Action* (1999) and components of *Health and Physical Education* (1998) were two documents made available to teachers.

However, time to read and discuss the information outlined in the documents, as a group of educators, had been limited. There had also been little if any training or professional development regarding the information. Without specific information concerning bullying, money for resources, and professional development from the Ministry of Education and Training, schools have been left with the daunting task of finding an antibullying program to suit their needs. Without the training as to what bullying is and the lasting effects it has on its victims, proper antibullying programs will not be put into place. Teachers cannot effectively work towards stopping bullying if they do not know what it is they are trying to stop. Holt and Keyes (2004) found that the attitudes held by teachers in regards to bullying affected the levels of bullying within the school. When teachers opposed bullying actions and intervened in bullying situations, they sent a clear message that bullying would not be tolerated, and the schools' climate became less accepting of bullying (Holt & Keyes, 2004). With the legal mandates for safe schools and the heavy workloads with respect to the curriculum, how are teachers managing to address the problem of bullying in their schools?

The answer to this question may have come along with the new legislation regarding bullying in schools. *Safe@School* (Ontario Teachers' Federation and le Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions, 2007) is a bullying prevention project designed to assist teachers, students and their communities. The Ministry of Education funds the project. The goal of this project was to create changes across the system for teachers and students. A website containing information about bullying has been made available to teachers across Ontario ([www.safeatschool.ca](http://www.safeatschool.ca)). The Ministry provided a half day of release time so a core group of teachers could have a look at the e-learning modules on

the website. The number of staff released from each school depended on the enrolment of their school. Four teachers, including me, were released to look at the information for our school.

The website contains an enormous amount of information regarding bullying. However, we were not able to go through all of the information contained on the website in the time we were given. As a group, we shared what we felt was important with the remainder of our staff and made sure they knew they could access the website to view the information firsthand. There was no mandate that teachers look at the website, and no additional time will be given for other staff members to familiarize themselves with the information. So I ask the question again, with the legal mandates for safe schools and the heavy workloads with respect to the curriculum, how are teachers managing to address the problem of bullying in their schools?

### **Background of the Problem**

Bullying has existed in schools and has been a topic of public discussion since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rigby, Smith, & Pepler, 2004). To this day, peer victimization and bullying continue to be a problem affecting many countries around the world (Barone, 1997; Charach et al., 1995; Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Eslea, 1998; Pepler, 2006; Rigby et al., 2004). So why has bullying, something that has been a part of school life for ages, resurfaced as a current topic in schools today? Some people may hold Olweus's (1993) research responsible for the current discussions surrounding the nature and prevalence of school bullying.

In the early 80's the Norwegian media reported that three young boys had committed suicide as a result of bullying by their peers (Olweus, 1993). The Norwegian

government sought advice from Olweus, an expert in the field of bullying, who proceeded to design a school-wide bullying intervention program (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997). Olweus carried out a number of studies to assess the students' perceptions of bullying (Clarke & Kiselica). Olweus found that 9% of students surveyed reported being bullied and 7% reported bullying others (Clarke & Kiselica).

Similar studies conducted in Australia, England, and the United States found comparable results (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997). However, those surveyed in Australia, England, and the United States scored higher in both of the above categories: being bullied and bullying others (Clarke & Kiselica). Canada also initiated studies that focused on bullying, and the results showed that bullying was a concern in our schools (Charach et al., 1995; Craig et al., 2000; Pepler, 2007).

Olweus's (1993) findings state that for intervention to be most effective it must be directed at the entire school (Charach et al., 1995; Rigby et al., 2004). Bullying can take place in a variety of locations inside and outside of the school (Boulton, 1997), and specifically targeting interventions at an individual classroom level would give students a false sense of security. A school-wide policy that rejects bullying anywhere within the school is needed so students do not feel that they may be subjected to bullying when they leave their classrooms. Naturalistic observations of school bullying in classrooms and on the playground have been conducted by Canadian researchers, and results show that bullying is happening in both of these locations, although it is more likely to occur on the playground (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Students need to know that they will be safe from bullying in the hallways, in the bathrooms, on the playground, and as they walk to and from school. In *Bullying in Schools*, Smith, Pepler, and Rigby (2004) evaluate

bullying intervention programs that have occurred worldwide. One element that is common to bullying intervention around the world is a “whole school approach” (Rigby et al.). Rigby (1998), an Australian researcher, also states that a whole school approach increases chances for success and assists with the program’s longevity. Bosacki et al. (2006) found that a comprehensive antibullying initiative also needs to include a moral values component. If children can put themselves in the place of the victims they may begin to understand the harm they are causing. Pepler’s more recent research looks at “bullying as a relationship problem” (Pepler, 2007, p. 16). Pepler states that strengthening relationships between students will foster a more positive climate and therefore help to reduce incidents of bullying.

The literature clearly supports the need for bullying intervention programs, but changes to the curriculum to make room for this have not occurred. Politicians have discussed the need for character education in our schools, but it has not yet been mandated. If character education were included in the current curriculum, teachers would have to address it. However, without clear guidelines about how this fits into the schedule, where will we find the time to incorporate it? How can teachers be expected to cover all of the curriculum areas as well as addressing bullying and character development?

### **Research Questions**

The main questions that guided my research are as follows:

1. Who is impacted by bullying?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the phenomenon of bullying?
3. What are teachers’ experiences with curricular expectations and implementing



antibullying initiatives?

4. What are teachers' thoughts on the changes antibullying initiatives make in our schools?

5. What do teachers want or need to learn in order to address the issue of bullying and victimization?

### **Personal Background and Rationale**

In 1999, a southern Ontario Public Health Department gathered interested schools in the southwestern region of Ontario to discuss bullying. By the spring of 2000, three schools from the public board and one school from the separate board joined with Public Health to form the Good Kid Sid Bullying Prevention Pilot Project. The project would be in place for 3 years and would formally end in June 2003. The school where I was employed was selected to be one of the three schools representing the public board.

The Good Kid Sid Bullying Prevention Pilot Program (which will now be referred to as Good Kid Sid) was a 3 year, school-wide approach to bullying prevention. Good Kid Sid was a nongendered cartoon character with reddish-orange hair. It acted as the mascot for the program: an icon that everyone involved could associate with the initiative. The purpose of Good Kid Sid was to reduce incidents of bullying in school by making students aware of what bullying looks like and what they can do about it. It also provided the school's community with a common language to use when discussing bullying. The approach taken by each of the four schools was a multileveled, school-wide approach to bullying based on the research of Olweus (1993).

During the second year of the Good Kid Sid pilot project I began my Master of Education studies, on a part-time basis. In my introductory class we discussed possible

areas of interest for our future research that would take the form of a project or a thesis. I was interested in a lot of areas; however, I was particularly interested in conflicts between students and aggression. My principal at the time suggested I look at bullying. Our first year of implementing the school-wide prevention program went slowly. The information I would gather for my course work would benefit me as I took on the role of the chairperson for the Good Kid Sid committee.

In May 2002, I had the opportunity to attend the 3-day “Fear and Loathing: A Symposium on Bullying” conference in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. The goal of the conference was to generate discussion on the topic of bullying. It was an incredible experience to hear bullying research presented from the researchers themselves. I had the opportunity to hear national and international research experts speak about aggression, bullying, bullying intervention, and the importance of addressing this issue. I also had the opportunity to hear parents tell their stories: stories about how their child had suffered as result of bullying. Hearing their stories made me wonder if I was doing enough to keep the students I work with safe from the violence associated with bullying.

I attended the conference with a member of our local Public Health department, who was involved in the implementation of the Good Kid Sid pilot project. As I talked with other participants at the conference, I found out that I was one of only a few teachers in attendance. This was only somewhat surprising to me. The conference fee and the time away from work were probably two main reasons for the lack of teachers in attendance. I was fortunate; this was the year that I was selected to receive some funding from my local union (each year a small number of applicants receive STEL funding, money that can be used towards professional development). If it were not for the funding

and the use of my personal day, plus the additional money that I had to put towards my accommodation and transportation, I would have missed out on the opportunity. Hearing Dan Olweus, Debra Pepler, Wendy Craig, and Jennifer Connolly, to name a few, speak firsthand about their research allowed me to understand the full scope of bullying. It allowed me to dispel any myths I may have believed as a result of my past experiences. Hearing the heart-wrenching stories of parents who have lost their children as a result of bullying made the severity of this problem facing schools a reality. Bullying was affecting our children, and something needed to be done about it. Boulton (1997) cites the role that teachers play in the prevention of school bullying as being critical.

I left the conference with mixed emotions, the first of which was an overwhelming sense that our initiative was extremely important. I felt reassured that the measures we had taken in our antibullying initiative thus far were similar to those that the researchers had spoken about. We were making our students aware of the nature of bullying, what they can do when they witness it, and that it will no longer be tolerated in our school. Although I was excited to hear experts in the field talk about their research, I was also frustrated. Teachers play an important role in the prevention of bullying (Boulton, 1997; Holt & Keyes, 2004; Nicolaidis, Toda, & Smith, 2002) and in the initiation of antibullying programs, but why were we not included in the discussion? How was this important information regarding the nature and prevalence of bullying, the people involved in bullying, and the effects it has on its victims going to get to the people that needed to hear it? As it came time for me to decide on a direction for my research, my path was clear. I wanted to include teachers in the discussion on bullying. I wanted to ensure that we were present in the literature regarding school bullying. My personal

feelings are supported by current research. "It is surprising, therefore, that teachers' attitudes have been largely neglected in studies on bullying" (Beran, 2005, p. 43).

Nicolaides et al. (2002) state that the training of new teachers does not include specific and detailed discussions on bullying. Teachers need to hear about the nature and prevalence of school bullying, and they need to become aware of the effects peer victimization and bullying are having on their students so they will be more effective in preventing it from continuing in our schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of 5 elementary school teachers as they each implement an antibullying program in their school. The individual stories of each of the teachers described what the antibullying initiative looked like at their school site and how their journey into the bullying phenomenon has changed their personal beliefs, their students, and their school's climate.

Many researchers claim that teachers play an important role in the implementation of antibullying programs (Boulton, 1997; Charach et al., 1995; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1998). However, research on teachers' perceptions regarding antibullying programs is limited (Beran, 2005; Boulton; Nicolaides et al., 2002). Is this the missing piece that is preventing antibullying programs from making a major impact in the bullying phenomena facing our students today? In an attempt to further the discussion on bullying within the current literature, this research reported on the perceptions and experiences of elementary teachers as they implemented an antibullying initiative within their respective schools.

### **Safety and Academic Excellence: Can We Have Both in Our Schools?**

The *Ontario Schools Code of Conduct* (Ministry of Education and Training, 2000) states that “a school is a place that promotes responsibility, respect, civility and academic excellence in a safe learning and teaching environment” (p. 1). The document goes on to state that “all students, parents, teachers and staff have the right to be safe, and feel safe, in their school community” (p. 1). Schools are supposed to be safe learning environments. Personal experience leads me to believe that the emphasis today is on learning and academic achievement and not the safety of our students or the environment they inhabit.

Academic excellence is mandatory in schools today. There is a clear expectation that students excel and continue to excel, specifically in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The Ontario Ministry of Education has set a target that by 2008, 75% of grade 6 students will be achieving a level 3 or at least 75% in the areas of literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education and Training, 2007). Noddings’s (2003) research states that schools continue to favour theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge. The longtime debate regarding theory and practice has made some skills more important or more respected than others (Noddings). Have we as educators focused so heavily on the pursuit of academics that we have ignored the social and emotional needs of our students? Rigby et al. (2004) state “there is a clear moral imperative on teachers and educators to act to reduce bullying in schools” (p. 1). The government, the public, and educators alike want students to excel academically. But what are we willing to risk to see these results? “Students who are depressed or angry literally cannot learn.” (Gibbs, 1995, p. 114). Hoglund (2007) researched the relationship between victimization and

achievement, specifically gender differences, in response to relational and physical victimization and how school functioning was altered. Hoglund found that low achievement and disengagement from school were linked to relational and physical types of victimization. "Prevention that can target victimization while inspiring disaffected adolescents to become interested and invested in the learning process may be a prime route to supporting academic achievement in early adolescence, for both girls and boys" (Hoglund, p. 697). If we want academic excellence, we need to address social skills and deal with the problems affecting our students.

Noddings coined the phrases caring environments or the notion of caring in schools (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Noddings (2003) does not equate education with rigorous training. The role of schools is to develop the students' ability to think, to question and to contribute (Noddings). Noddings compares the "best schools to the best homes" (p. 260). If schools introduced a type of environment where students were taught to care, communicate, co-operate, and enjoy learning there might be a change in the levels of violence seen within the school (Noddings).

For 3 years I participated in the implementation of an antibullying program in an elementary school. It was a tremendous amount of work. Initially, we needed to become aware of the bullying phenomenon and believe it was happening in our school; we needed to know what it looked like and how we as a school community can effectively intervene when bullying occurs. We also needed to dispel any myths that we believed to be true. We taught students what they can do when they witness bullying. We tracked the bullying that occurred at our site so we knew what areas needed our attention. In the

end, the results were indisputable. We were making a positive difference in our students concerning bullying.

The safety of our children is at risk as a result of bullying. There is research to support the implementation of antibullying programs and evidence documenting the success seen by researchers and educators globally. Our own Ministry of Education and Training states the need for a safe learning environment. Many educators have seen the need and are taking up the challenge of addressing bullying in their schools. This study will allow teachers to share their stories surrounding the implementation of an antibullying program, thus adding to the current body of literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

It was previously stated that, “a school is a place that promotes responsibility, respect, civility and academic excellence in a safe learning and teaching environment” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2000, p. 1). As a teacher, I want the best for my students. I want each student to reach his or her academic potential as well as becoming kind, caring people who have a strong sense of themselves and positive relationships with others. Bullying will prevent some students from reaching their potential. In order to address the harmful effects of bullying, one must understand the behaviours of those involved. “Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917 – 2005) was a pioneer in studying the behavior of children in their natural life space of family, school, peer group, and community” (Brendtro, 2006, p. 162). However, to truly understand a child, one must examine not only the behaviour but also the reasons for their behaviours. Bandura (2001) studied social cognitive theory, which examines human actions (referred to as agencies) through

personal, proxy, and collective modes. The research of Bronfenbrenner and Bandura, as it relates to bullying, will be briefly explored.

Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development is based on children having strong positive relationships that continue to evolve over time with one or more persons (Brendtro, 2006). A healthy ecology is threefold: it includes positive relationships with caregivers and positive discipline, supportive teachers and academic success and peer acceptance and prosocial values (Brendtro). A high-risk ecology has the opposite: poor relationships with caregivers and inconsistent discipline, conflict with teachers and academic failure, and peer conflict and antisocial values (Brendtro, 2006). Are antibullying initiatives helping to build healthy ecologies for our students?

Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) examines the choices people make and why they make them as they make their way through our complex world; it seeks to explain human functioning. Bandura stated that the outcomes of one's actions play a part in their development. However, people do not grow in isolation; the people around them and their environment shape their development (Bandura). Are our schools and the people inside them helping to shape students who are opposed to bullying, or are we allowing or even encouraging it to exist?

Two theories are being used to frame this study: Bronfenbrenner's healthy ecology (Brendtro, 2006) and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's research made me wonder if antibullying initiatives are helping to create healthy ecologies for our students, and Bandura's work forced me to think about the school environment and the role it plays in bullying. Exploring and understanding



teachers' perceptions of bullying in their respective schools will help us address these questions.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative case study explored the phenomena of bullying through the eyes of 5 elementary teachers. Although at different schools, the teachers worked for the same board in the southwestern region of Ontario. All of the teachers received training regarding the Imagine...A School without Bullying Program from the local Health Department and were implementing the program in their respective schools. This research examined the teachers' perceptions and experiences surrounding bullying and their antibullying initiative.

The sample size is small, and no other antibullying programs were explored or discussed in this research. The Imagine program is not the only antibullying program used in this school board; however it is the only one that offers schools a common training. Schools that decide to opt into this program can send a limited number of staff to training sessions.

The purpose of this research was not to evaluate the Imagine program or compare it to other antibullying programs. The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of teachers implementing the Imagine antibullying initiative and add their knowledge to the current research on bullying. I do not believe all teachers are aware of what constitutes bullying, what it looks like, and the lasting effects it has on students. I do not believe teachers have received the training to help them address bullying with their students. I wanted to know, "are we making a difference in the lives of our students regarding the phenomena of bullying?"

### **Outline of Remainder of the Document**

This research explored the lived experiences and perceptions of 5 elementary school teachers who have implemented an antibullying initiative. The purpose of this introductory chapter was to outline reasons for implementing antibullying programs in schools. Students have the right to feel safe while they are at school (Ministry of Education and Training, 2000), and teachers play an important role in ensuring their safety (Boulton, 1997).

The vignette at the beginning of this chapter described the celebration for my school community at the end of our 3 year antibullying pilot program. I want the readers of this research to approach the implementation of an antibullying program with optimism. Teachers can make an environment free from violence and protect their students from the harmful effects of bullying if they are aware of the problem.

To describe my experiences in implementing an antibullying program, each of the following chapters will begin with a personal vignette. The purpose of these stories is to provide a rich description of my personal and educational experiences during the implementation process. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature and explores the nature of bullying and those involved in this complex social problem. Chapter Three outlines the manner in which the research was collected and analyzed. Chapter Four describes the stories of 5 teachers who implemented antibullying programs in their respective schools. Common themes from their experiences, struggles, and personal insights are discussed within the context of past research. Chapter Five reviews the present study and summarizes significant findings. Future research directions and

implications for the development of antibullying initiatives in elementary schools are also discussed.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Aggression.* Through their naturalistic observations of school bullying, Hawkins et al., (2001) define aggression as “the intent to inflict injury, pain, or harm on another person through physical, verbal or covert means” (p. 516). The main factor that separates bullying from aggression is the power difference between the aggressor and the victim (Hawkins et al.).

*Bully.* The bully is the person who initiates the negative action (Hawkins et al., 2001).

*Bullying.* There is not a single definition of bullying that is accepted worldwide (Rigby et al., 2004). For the purposes of this paper, the term bullying refers to a person who is “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons” (Charach et al., 1995, p. 12). Bullying can be physical, verbal, or psychological (Nicolaidis et al., 2002). Characteristics of bullying include intent, imbalance of power and repetition (Olweus & Limber, 1999). It is the imbalance of power, that sets bullying apart from aggression.

*Direct aggression.* Direct aggression, also referred to as overt aggression, has received the most attention in the research surrounding bullying (Marini, Dane & Bosacki, 2006). This type of aggression is visible and can be physical or verbal (Marini et al.).

*Indirect aggression.* Indirect aggression, or covert aggression, is more secretive (Marini et al., 2006). This type of aggression usually involves spreading rumours or excluding peers (Marini et al.). Craig et al. (2000) found that children were more likely to use direct bullying on the playground and indirect bullying in the classroom.

*Negative actions.* The term negative action needs to encompass any and all negative actions; however it often focuses on physical actions. Negative actions include “intentionally inflicting, or attempting to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another” (Olweus & Limber, 1999). Due to the vast nature of negative actions in bullying situations, many researchers have categorized bullying based on the underlying type of aggression utilized by the bully.

*School environment or climate.* School environment or climate refers to “the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time” (Peterson & Skiba, 2000, p. 122). Students may not come forward to report bullying if they are unsure of the support the teachers will provide (Craig et al., 2000; Holt & Keyes, 2004). Therefore, we need to create a climate where students believe teachers will support them. For example, in the introduction, I discussed how the climate of the school that I was working at changed as the result of the antibullying initiative. Our students knew that we, as teachers, would listen and respond to their bullying concerns.

*Victim.* The victim is the recipient of the negative actions (Hawkins et al., 2001).

*Whole school approach to bullying.* A “whole school” approach to bullying is an approach that addresses bullying from a school, classroom, and individual level (Rigby et al., 2004). Students in the school are made aware of the school’s policy on bullying and know that regardless of where they are on the school’s property, bullying will not be tolerated.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*Assemblies during our antibullying initiative were commonplace. School-wide assemblies were held at least once a month, and they were a mixture of events. The Good Kid Sid committee used these assemblies to convey important information about bullying, classes took turns sharing so students could see what their peers were doing in their classrooms, and individual student achievements were celebrated.*

*School-wide assemblies were an important part of our antibullying initiative. As a staff, we had decided that they were the best way for our entire population, staff, students, and parents that chose to attend, to hear the same information about bullying. It was our chance to instill a common language about our antibullying initiative to everyone in our community. Students from kindergarten to grade 6 knew that when the teachers put on their brightly coloured orange T-shirts, they were in for an assembly on bullying. The orange T-shirts displayed the mascot for the Good Kid Sid antibullying initiative; Good Kid Sid was a nongendered cartoon character with reddish-orange hair. This mascot appeared on all of our antibullying information. The icon was on bulletin boards that displayed information about bullying, and it went beside information in school newsletters. We even had it printed on balls that were used outside at recess and lunchtime and on fridge magnets that were sent home. We wanted everyone, including our non-English-speaking families, to recognize the Good Kid Sid mascot and know that important information regarding bullying was being presented. The orange T-shirts set the stage for the Good Kid Sid committee; the students, as well as staff and parents in attendance, knew important bullying information was coming.*

*It was in these school-wide assemblies that the teachers role-played scenarios we had witnesses on the playground. It was our chance to show our students what behaviours constitute bullying and also what they can do when they are being bullied or are witnessing bullying happening to someone else. Initially we would model how we wanted students to respond, but by the third year of our project we would freeze the role-play and ask for students in the audience to provide different ways to handle the conflict.*

*Assemblies also provided an opportunity for classes to present something that they had been working on or learning. In a very informal manner, classes held up artwork, recited a poem, or read their favourite book reviews to name a few. We wanted our students to know one another, to get along, and assemblies were one way to achieve this goal.*

*The finale of each monthly assembly was the "gotcha" draw, a chance to celebrate individual student achievements. Throughout the month, students were given tickets when they were "caught" doing the right thing, such as following the rules of our anti-bullying initiative. The tickets went into a draw, and 10 student names were selected (5 from a primary grade and 5 from a junior grade). Each student received a prize, and the entire school celebrated.*

*Assemblies helped to create the positive climate within our school and strengthen our sense of community. Students were given the opportunity to learn about bullying in a manner that was memorable and celebrate the accomplishments and successes of other students. Teachers were given the opportunity to learn about bullying in a nonthreatening manner and acknowledge the hard work that students were doing to*

*prevent bullying from happening in our school. I will never forget the times I put on my brightly coloured orange T-shirt, and I hope they don't either.*

### **Setting the Stage: The Nature of Bullying**

Bullying cannot occur in isolation. For bullying to occur, at least two people must be present: the bully and the victim. What transpires between two people to trigger an incident of bullying? Why does someone choose to bully? What role does the environment play in bullying? Urie Bronfenbrenner and Albert Bandura will help to address these questions. Bronfenbrenner examined relationships and the effects they had on children (Brendtro, 2006). He stated strong, lasting relationships lead to a healthy ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1991). Bandura's social cognitive theory studied the choices people make and how it plays a role in their development (Bandura, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's and Bandura's theories together will form the theoretical framework for this study.

Aggression is a normal aspect of child development (Doll, Song, & Siemers, 2004). As children enter the adolescent years, physical aggression decreases and there is little need for intervention to occur (Marini, Spear, & Bombay, 1999). It is during the elementary school years that children learn socially acceptable ways to behave when facing conflicts (Marini et al.). However, some children maintain their tendency to use physical aggression and do not develop socially acceptable behaviours (Marini et al.). It is in these situations that adults must intervene. Students need to be taught how to solve conflicts using nonviolent means. Students need to understand that bullying behaviours will not be tolerated. The effects of peer bullying are immediate and can have lasting consequences (Grotperter & Crick, 1996; Smith & Sharpe, 1994).

Verbal aggression (name-calling) follows a different developmental path. Unlike physical aggression, which decreases with age, verbal aggression increases as the child develops language skills and then eventually levels off (Coie & Dodge, 1998). While research had indicated that boys utilize physical forms of aggression more often than girls (Charach et al., 1995), researchers differ in their accounts of which gender utilizes verbal forms of aggression more often (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004).

Social aggression follows a developmental path that differs from both physical and verbal forms of aggression. Underwood (2003) found that social forms of aggression (also known as relational or indirect aggression: rumours, exclusion) increased from early to middle childhood, continuing through into the adolescent years. This form of aggression reaches a climax in adolescence and then should decline as the child ages (Underwood). However, Owens (1996) claims that social aggression may continue into the high school years. The research is not yet clear as to whether or not social aggression is demonstrated more often by boys or girls (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) was a pioneer in the field of child behaviour, and he created a new field of study, the ecology of human development (Brendtro, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's research looks closely at human relationships and the effects they have on children. Bronfenbrenner (1991) states that children need strong, lasting relationships in order to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and morally. In today's world, two-parent families with close ties to extended families are not as frequent as in the past. My classroom is a mixture of one- and two-parent families; some have strong relationships with their grandparents and some do not. There are also children being



raised by someone other than a parent. Bronfenbrenner (1961) reported a healthy ecology consists of strong family connections, positive relationships with teachers, academic success, and being accepted by one's peers, while a high risk ecology consists of the opposite: poor family relationships with inconsistent discipline, conflict with teachers, poor academic performances, and conflicts with peers. Brendtro (2006) cites building a supportive ecology around a child (family, school, and peers) as the most powerful means of intervention. Would we see a decrease in bullying and child aggression if we as teachers strengthened our relationships with students and worked towards creating more positive relationships between students?

Bronfenbrenner extended the world of the child past family, teachers, and peers. The child's world consists of four concentric rings that radiate outward from the center and a linear system that marks the changes to the people and the environment over time: (a) Microsystem, (b) Mesosystem, (c) Exosystem, (d) Macrosystem, and (e) Chronosystem (Swick & Williams, 2006). Each of these systems is specific to the child and will provide a variety of options for their development. The Microsystem is the child's immediate environment (Swick & Williams). The Mesosystem is made of family, teachers, peers, neighbours, health care professionals, and religious affiliates (Swick & Williams). This system provides a support system for the immediate family. If strong relationships exist in this system, the child will thrive; this system provides the opportunity for new relationships to be formed, which again expand the growth opportunities for the child (Swick & Williams). If this system is not in place, parents will be left the sole responsibility of raising their child. The Exosystem includes extended family members, friends of the family, and community services (Swick & Williams).

The Macrosystem is comprised of laws, customs, and social class. The Chronosystem addresses changes in the people that interact with the child and his or her environment (Swick & Williams). If bullying interferes with the positive interactions of any of the systems, the child's development will be altered.

Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) state that the relationship between the child and the teacher may affect how well a child adjusts to school in later years. They also looked at the role peer relationships play in student achievement at school. Children who were excluded by their peers in kindergarten faced greater difficulties in later grades, and peer exclusion and peer abuse led to less engagement in school and a decline in academic achievement (Buhs et al.). Hoglund (2007) states that in order to decrease the number of girls and boys that disengage from learning, prevention strategies must target relational and physical victimization. Girls need to learn how to address the emotions, stress, and anxiety that accompany relational victimization, and boys need to learn how to address their anger and the need to retaliate after an incident of physical victimization if they are to stay engaged in their learning (Hoglund). Academic success will not be achieved if bullying and victimization remain a part of the culture of schools today.

Are academic success and the removal of bullying from our schools common goals for all teachers and students? Through social cognitive theory, Bandura (2001) was able to study the choices people made and their reasons for doing so. If your actions intentionally cause something to happen, you are an agent in your own self-development (Bandura). If I want to learn a new skill, I could read about it or enroll in lessons that will help me achieve the desired skill. I have intentionally taken actions to make my goal possible. In this way, I am an agent in my own personal growth. However, before

personal goals can become a reality, one must possess: forethought, the ability to monitor or regulate one's own goals according to moral values, the environment, and desired outcomes, and reflective capabilities (Bandura). Forethought allows you to consider consequences and determine an appropriate course of action (Bandura). People make choices that allow them to feel a sense of pride or self-worth. The ability to monitor your goals and make adjustments to ensure they happen is essential (Bandura). The timeline for achieving your goals also becomes a factor in regulating your achievements. Goals that will not be achieved in the short term provide less motivation to continue with the actions being taken, whereas goals that provide a quicker sense of pride or self-worth provide more motivation for the participant (Bandura). Are the rewards of antibullying initiatives so far removed that teachers and students alike do not see the need to continue with their efforts? If you have never been affected by bullying, or had someone close to you affected by bullying why would you choose to participate in an anti-bullying initiative? How do we encourage people to set a goal to eliminate bullying from our schools?

Bullying has previously been defined as being “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons” (Charach et al., 1995, p. 12). The main features of this act of aggression are intent to harm, an imbalance of power, and the repetitive nature of the aggressor (Olweus & Limber, 1999).

Ross (1998) further defines bullying behaviour as direct or indirect. Direct bullying refers to behaviours that include: shoving, poking, throwing things, taking things, slapping, hitting, choking, punching, kicking, beatings, and stabbing (Ross). Indirect bullying refers to behaviours that include: name-calling, taunting, spreading

rumors, gossiping, arguing others into submission, threats of withdrawing friendship, the silent treatment, and exclusion from the group (Ross). Grotzinger and Crick (1996) found the former type of aggression to be more characteristic of boys and the latter to be more characteristic of girls.

Marini et al. (1999) use the terms overt and covert when describing forms of bullying. The former term relates to direct or open forms of aggression, while the latter refers to more underground or indirect forms of aggression (Marini et al.). Unlike Ross (1998), Marini et al. divide the types of behaviours exhibited by bullies into four categories: overt-physical bullying, overt-psychological bullying, covert-physical bullying, and covert- psychological bullying.

Overt-physical bullying is the type of bullying most often associated with this act of aggression (Marini et al., 1999). It is the pushing, hitting, and kicking. Overt-psychological bullying is also a direct and open act of aggression. This type of bullying usually involves teasing, taunting, or threatening comments (Marini et al.). Both of these forms are made public by the directness of their actions. If teachers knew what to look for and did not resort to the myths that surround bullying, these acts of aggression should be spotted and dealt with. The covert forms of peer bullying are more underground and therefore more difficult to detect.

Covert-physical bullying (Marini et al., 1999) generally takes place in a group-bullying situation. It is described as what may occur in a gang situation, when the dominant bully orders another member of the gang, a more passive bully, to attack a third person (Marini et al.). Onlookers to this type of aggression may never realize who the initial instigator of the violence was because they may not be present at the time the

aggressive act was carried out. The instigator of the violence may not name the dominant bully as being involved for fear of retaliation.

The final type of bullying behaviour is covert-psychological bullying (Marini et al., 1999). This type of bullying involves spreading rumours, sending anonymous notes, or making obscene phone calls. Pepler and Craig (1995) found that this type of social exclusion might create a situation in which victims do not or cannot leave the bullying or ask for help from an adult.

Simmons (2002) focuses on relational aggression as an additional type of bullying to be studied. Relational aggression includes, “ignoring someone to punish them or get one’s own way, excluding someone socially for revenge, using negative body language or facial expressions, sabotaging someone else’s relationships, or threatening to end a relationship unless a friend agrees to a request” (Simmons, p. 21).

History has portrayed girls as “whimsical, deceitful, subtle and vacillating” (Simmons, 2002, p. 16). Today we live in a society that continues to value masculine aggression and feminine sweetness. Girls are raised to be good, and in doing so are taught not to show their anger but to be nice and caring (Simmons). It has been my experience in the classroom that girls are often rewarded for sitting still and calmly putting up their hand when they have something to say. Boys, on the other hand, are often penalized for their boisterous behaviour and for calling out. This sends messages that we value the demure or almost passive nature often displayed by girls and reject the more physical response of boys. Are we encouraging girls to push down their aggressive tendencies and find alternative outlets to express them?

Name-calling, gossiping, excluding, and spreading rumors are also forms of bullying, yet these negative actions do not receive the attention that physical acts of violence do. Up until now, name-calling, gossiping, excluding, and spreading rumors have been the avenues chosen by girls to express their anger (Simmons, 2002), without the threat of consequence. Often covert and secretive in nature, girls have been able to torture others without anyone seeing it or stopping them.

Boulton's (1997) research may corroborate the preceding findings. Boulton suggests that not all teachers see some indirect forms of bullying (teasing) or relational aggression (social exclusion) as actual bullying events (Boulton). Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) reported school counselors rated relational bullying as a less serious incident when compared to physical and verbal bullying. Jacobsen and Bauman found that counselors who had received training regarding bullying and its harmful effects were more likely to intervene in relational bullying than counselors with no bullying training. If teachers are not clear on what constitutes bullying, it will be difficult to prevent it from occurring in our schools. Defining bullying is just one step in preventing it from entering our schools and affecting our students. Teachers need to be able to recognize all forms of bullying when it is happening so they can intervene. Due to the nature of bullying, and the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, adult intervention is necessary in stopping bullying in some scenarios.

Information regarding bullying has typically been gathered using questionnaires, student self-reports, and surveys (Nicolaidis et al., 2002). Craig et al. (2000) state that questionnaires and self-reports provide a lot information regarding the prevalence, location, and types of bullying that is occurring as well as providing the respondents with

some confidentiality. A drawback of this method of data collection is the ability or inability of the students to identify and report on incidents occurring on the playground (Craig et al.). Bosacki et al. (2006) found that qualitative research provided them with a different perspective to the problem of bullying. Eighty-two children between the ages of 8 and 12 from English-speaking families were asked to draw a picture of someone being bullied and then talk about their picture; open-ended questions were asked to further the discussions (Bosacki et al.). Participants shared insights that would have gone unnoticed if quantitative methods had been employed (Bosacki et al.). The majority of the drawings (97%) contained only a bully and a victim; the gender of the bully usually reflected the same sex as the participant (90%); many of the bullies had smiles on their faces (78%); and finally, verbal messages along with the pictures decreased as the children got older (Bosacki et al.). This last finding is significant. We know some teachers are unable to identify indirect forms of bully as actual bullying events (Boulton, 1997), and others have not received the training required to identify bullying. If teachers cannot identify bullying and students stop talking about bullying as they get older, how will we keep our students safe and prevent them from experiencing the devastating effects of bullying?

Three other Canadian researchers were able to conduct “naturalistic observations” on the playground and in classrooms (Craig et al., 2000). Researchers videotaped 34 students (24 male and 10 female) in a school environment and watched peer bullying incidents unfold. Twenty students were primary aged (grades 1–3) and 14 students were juniors (grades 4–6); the majority of the students being videotaped were boys; only 10 were female (Craig et al., 2000). Cameras were set up to record playground and classroom incidents. The participants were aware of the filming; they wore a remote

microphone and a transmitter (Craig et al.). Through their videotaped observations, Craig et al. (2000) witnessed acts of aggression and bullying on the playground and in the classroom.

On the playground, aggression was demonstrated by children every 2.4 minutes, whereas it was seen every 37 minutes in the classroom (Craig et al., 2000). Direct bullying was seen more often in playground scenarios, whereas indirect bullying took place more often in classrooms (Craig et al.). Boys tend to participate in direct or overt bullying more than often girls do (Olweus & Limber, 1999). When girls become involved in bullying, they opt for more indirect or covert forms of aggression (Grotperter & Crick, 1996; Olweus & Limber).

Bullying episodes are typically 33.6 seconds long on the playground and 26 seconds long in the classroom (Craig et al., 2000). Teachers need to be able to recognize the potential for bullying, for instance a group of students with a lot of power approaching a more vulnerable student, and intervene appropriately. Due to the short timelines for bullying to occur, less than 34 seconds, teachers need to respond immediately if bullying rates are to decrease.

### **Roles of the Characters: Bully, Victim, Bystander, Bully-Victim**

The two obvious participants in bullying are the bully and the victim (Marini et al., 1999). The bully can be described as someone who does not like to comply with the rules (Marini et al.). Olweus and Limber (1999) described bullies as impulsive, dominant, lacking empathy and having a positive attitude towards violence. Empathy is the ability to feel compassion for someone else, to put yourself in someone else's position (Schilling, 1996). Olweus and Limber (1999) also describe the home environment in



which bullies are raised. The family of someone who bullies lacks warmth; the parents would be very permissive, but they would incorporate severe forms of punishment when necessary (Olweus and Limber).

The personality of a victim often includes a lack of power, little strength physically or psychologically, loneliness, and a sense of insecurity (Marini et al., 1999). Olweus and Limber (1999) state victims tend to be cautious and have a sensitive personality (they take comments very personally); they also show difficulty when having to stand up for themselves. Their families are described as being overprotective (Olweus & Limber). Victims also tend to lack a group of close friends (Olweus & Limber). The absence of close friends leaves the victim vulnerable. Grotper and Crick (1996) found that strong friendships might decrease the effects of peer rejection. If the victim is isolated and unwilling to report the violence, then who will? These students will continue to suffer, and it may go unnoticed by teachers for an indefinite period of time (Doll et al., 2004).

An important participant that is often overlooked is the bystander or bystanders. These are the children that witness the bullying. Watching the bullying and not responding sends a clear message to the victim; it says that this type of behaviour is acceptable. The bully also receives a message. They gain a sense of power because no one is challenging the behaviour. Charach et al. (1995) reported that 61% of students surveyed reported feeling that watching a bullying incident was difficult to see. A majority of bystanders admit they are unsure of how to intervene but would be willing to try (Charach et al.). However, a third of the students surveyed felt they could join in and participate in a bullying episode (Charach et al.). Bystanders offer a great deal of hope to

a bullying intervention program. Peers are present for 85% of incidents but rarely intervene (Hawkins et al., 2001). If teachers can give students the tools and the confidence to intervene in bullying incidents, then they will be able to stop incidents as they occur.

Marini, Dane, and Bosacki (2006) have defined a new character in the bullying phenomenon; 7,290 high school students completed a self-report covering direct and indirect bullying and victimization, antisocial acts, self-esteem, and peer relationship problems (Marini et al.). One third of the students who reported being involved in bullying or victimization scored as belonging to the bully-victim group (Marini et al.). The bully-victim is someone who shares the role of both bully and victim (Marini et al.). Concern arises when interventions are to occur. How are these students treated? The personalities of a bully (poor behaviour control, dominant) are very different from the personalities of a victim (anxious, submissive; Marini et al.). Marini et al. found their dual role in bullying might result in greater psychosocial risks for the student. Guidance counselors are no longer present in elementary schools in southern Ontario. A teacher must seek help at the school board level if a psychologist is required. Cases are ranked in terms of priority, and students are seen as assistance can be provided. Without specialized training in the specific needs of this group, how can teachers address the needs of these students?

### **Teachers' Myths Regarding Bullying**

Teachers need to know what bullying looks like, and they need to dispel any myths they have regarding bullying if we are going to prevent it from affecting our students. Teacher Education, when addressing bullying, should involve the unlearning of

bullying myths (Marini et al., 1999). The old adage “boys will be boys” allows bad behaviour to continue and “crybaby” reinforces to the victim that no one will help them (Marini et al.). Atlas and Pepler (1998) report that teachers were often unaware of bullying episodes and were therefore unable to assist students. Teachers may be misinterpreting detrimental schoolyard behaviour as childhood play (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997). Teachers need to become more aware of the issues surrounding the topic of bullying and develop a more responsive attitude towards incidents (Atlas & Pepler) because they may tend to view some of the acts of bullying as normal. In his research, Ross (1998) found teachers tend to revert to myths to explain their perceptions of bullying. A concern reported in the research of Smith, Cousins, and Stewart (2005) is that teachers and parents are still not convinced of the seriousness of bullying and victimization occurring in schools today. Is the acceptance of the myths that surround bullying and victimization preventing antibullying initiatives from being effective?

### **Overview of Antibullying Programs: Prevention and Intervention**

Literature has shown that there is a bullying crisis facing our students today. Researchers have defined bullying, listed characteristics of potential bullies and victims and outlined the importance of the bystanders. Many researchers would agree that the teacher plays an important role in preventing peer bullying and victimization from affecting the students at their schools (Beran, 2005; Boulton, 1997; Nicolaides et al., 2002; Olweus & Limber, 1999; Rigby, 1998). However, a concern reported in the research of Pepler, Smith, and Rigby (2004) is that teachers, parents, and students alike, are still not convinced that bullying education, intervention and prevention is essential for

our society. What needs to happen before everyone believes that bullying is not only affecting schools but is detrimental to society?

Bronfenbrenner felt the most effective way to prevent youth from participating in anti-social behaviour was to involve positive adult role models and encourage youths to engage and find solutions to their problems (Brendtro, 2006). This next section will address what other researchers feel are the necessary steps schools should take in the prevention of peer bullying and victimization.

### *Prevention*

Prevention, by definition, means to stop something from happening. Olweus and Limber (1999) feel teachers are crucial components of an antibullying prevention program. If teachers are not in support of decreasing bullying at their schools or in changing the current condition of their school climate, success will be difficult, if at all possible (Olweus & Limber). Rigby (1998) furthers the importance of the teachers by stating that teachers need to recognize bullying is occurring and have a belief that the effects of peer bullying and victimization are serious. Beran (2005) recommends teacher training in bullying prevention and intervention. Antibullying prevention strategies can be successful only if teachers believe they can handle bullying incidents (Beran).

Antibullying initiatives need to be multileveled; the school, the classroom, and the individual students need to hear and convey the same message about bullying (Olweus & Limber, 1999): Bullying will not be tolerated. Rigby (1998) includes the creation of school policy on bullying as a means of conveying the message that this school does not allow bullying. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training's *Safe Schools Strategy Training* document (2007) states all boards are required to have a policy on bullying

prevention and intervention in place by February 1, 2008. This document also outlines the Safe School Strategy, the Education Amendment Act, the inclusion of bullying on the Activities Leading to Possible Suspension List, the Provincial Code of Conduct, and Bullying Prevention and Intervention. The section on Bullying Prevention and Intervention states effective prevention is in the form of school-wide programming (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training).

Along with the *Safe Schools Strategy Training* document (Ministry of Education and Training, 2007), schools were given a safe@school CD ROM. This CD ROM contains e-learning modules to help teachers address bullying and bullying prevention. The modules go through understanding what constitutes bullying, how to “interrupt” bullying, healthy communication, and how to mobilize your school and foster a positive school culture; professional and classroom resources are also provided.

The Ministry itself has taken steps to change attitudes towards bullying. These steps include school climate surveys, pamphlets with information for parents, a partnership with Kids Help Phone, and registration in a bullying prevention program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

### *Intervention*

Intervention, by definition, means to be placed or come between others or to modify or prevent some event. Canadian researchers outlined steps that they felt were needed in the intervention of peer bullying and victimization. Charach et al. (1995) stressed the need for school policies which clearly address bullying, and they support a multilevel approach when intervening in bullying situations. Classroom discussion will provide students with the opportunity to discuss the rules regarding bullying, role-play

solutions, and continue to make students aware of the problems involved with bullying behaviour (Charach et al.). Charach et al. also stated the importance of adult supervision in the playground.

Bosacki et al. (2006) discuss the importance of a moral value component to intervention programs. Children in their research mentioned appearance, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status as reasons for bullying (Bosacki et al.). Intervention cannot alter these issues. However, having the bully empathize with how the victim is feeling may be effective in stopping bullying. Focusing on or teaching children about positive character traits (empathy, respect, kindness) or moral values may help to reduce bullying at schools.

Pepler (2006) does not look at bullying from a punitive stance; instead, she thinks bullying is about relationships and will therefore require relationship solutions. Using the analogy of binoculars, Pepler looks at the specific characteristics and needs of the individual (bully, victim, bully-victim) with one lens and the relationships of those involved with another lens. If a teacher discusses what a recess should look like and feel like for all students, he/she is reinforcing desirable behaviour. Pepler refers to this as scaffolding. By providing students with supports to make it through situations that may be challenging (an isolated student having to go outside for recess), they are giving the students tools to make the right choice. Bullies may rethink their actions because they can now empathize with how their victims might feel. Victims have tools to deal with difficult situations if they arise. Pepler believes the development of positive relationships will provide an environment in which bystanders feel comfortable to intervene in bullying situations. Fostering healthy relationships between our students may also

prevent bullying in our schools. Helping students develop positive relationships at a young age will set the stage for positive relationships throughout their lives (Pepler).

### **Overview of the “Imagine...A School Without Bullying” Document**

This research focused on teachers involved in the implementation of the program entitled “Imagine...A School Without Bullying: A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention.” This program is based on “Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities” and was developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education/Ministry of the Attorney General, 1998).

Experiences gained by the four Good Kid Sid pilot schools, conducted prior to the creation of this document, have been woven through this document to expand upon the British Columbia information and to give it some local perspective. Members of the health department, along with members of the public and catholic school boards in which this study took place, have adapted the lesson plans included in the document to match Ontario curriculum expectations.

The focus of the program was to create positive school environments where respect and support for fellow students is seen and demonstrated by the school community. Decreasing aggression, thus preventing the opportunity for bullying to occur, is also addressed in the document. The document, which is provided to schools that choose to participate in this program, outlines: what constitutes bullying, what a school-wide plan looks like, how to establish a school climate committee, who should be involved, and creating a school plan. It also contains information on responding to bullying situations and class lessons that address bullying and strategies to respond to these types of behaviours. The lessons are divided into three modules and cover

kindergarten through grade 8. Resources, a sample plan for implementation, and a teacher's handbook are also included. The teacher's handbook is a condensed version of the information found at the beginning of the document and is able to be copied by schools. This allows teachers access to the information regarding the nature of bullying, myths, what to look for, and how to respond to bullying in their classrooms.

PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network) is a new initiative consisting of Canadian researchers, government, and nongovernment agencies working towards the elimination of bullying. Wendy Craig and Debra Pepler are the codirectors of PREVNet. The goal of this initiative is to make people aware of bullying and promote positive relationships among Canadian youth. PREVNet cited the 'Imagine...A School Without Bullying' as one of their success stories (Pepler & Craig, 2007).

### **Researcher's Perspective and Context of Present Study**

The Ministry of Education has created policies on bullying but has neglected to train teachers as to what constitutes peer bullying and victimization. Without this knowledge, teachers miss opportunities to prevent or intervene in bullying situations or, worse, choose to ignore bullying, resorting to their belief that what they are witnessing is normal childhood behaviour (Craig et al., 2000).

Research has shown that bullies tend to remain bullies; in fact they are more likely to be involved with the police, require social and mental agencies more frequently, or turn to alcohol and or drugs (Marini et al., 1999). Bullying is not just an educational concern, it is a concern for society at large. There is a lack of qualitative data exploring teachers' views on the problem of bullying (Beran, 2005; Boulton, 1997). Nicolaides et



al. (2002) report that few studies look at the perspectives of teachers in regards to bullying. If teachers play an important role in antibullying initiatives, then research needs to look at bullying from the eyes of a teacher. The purpose of this research was to include teachers, their experiences, and their perceptions after implementing antibullying initiatives, in the current discussion on bullying

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the current research surrounding bullying and victimization. The elementary years are important to healthy development. It is in these years that children learn how to handle conflicts in socially acceptable ways (Marini et al., 1999). Aggression is a normal part of development (Doll et al., 2004), but children who rely on aggression need adults to intervene and demonstrate positive ways to resolve conflicts. This chapter explored Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development (Brendtro, 2006) and the importance of healthy relationships between a child and his or her caregivers, teachers, and peers. In order for children to thrive, they need to feel that they belong (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The relationship between academic success, engagement in classroom activities, and victimization was addressed. If bullying continues to exist in schools, children will not reach their academic potential.

Direct and indirect forms of bullying were outlined, as were the characters that are involved in bullying (bully, victim, bystander, and bully-victim). The myths that surround bullying and that are often believed to be true were exposed. The chapter concluded with a section on bullying prevention and intervention programs. The following chapter will outline the manner in which the research was collected and analysed.

### CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

*It was the beginning of our third year piloting the Good Kid Sid antibullying program. There were a few new staff members this year, but for the most part, everyone was aware of the initiative and was promoting the message that bullying would not be tolerated in our school. As a staff we had already received some professional development regarding bullying, but it was minimal. Sure, there were numerous books on the topic and hundreds of journal articles, but finding the time to read what the experts were saying was challenging. As chair of the antibullying committee I knew accessing information on bullying was important to maintaining momentum for our initiative, but finding a way to get the information to teachers was a challenge. There was also the fear of not wanting to overwhelm anyone. Teaching is a profession where you can never read enough about current trends and issues affecting children. Our school was also involved in a literacy initiative. This meant learning new ways to approach how we teach our students to read. Where would we find the time to read about bullying?*

*I was fortunate. I had begun my Master of Education studies and, on the advice of a former principal, made bullying my area of interest. After learning that Dr. Sandra Bosacki was conducting research in the area of bullying, I immediately enrolled in her class. During the course I was able to hear about bullying from the perspective of a researcher. She spoke passionately about her work involving bullying. I was excited to find connections between the research and our initiative. I felt I had a greater understanding of bullying and the importance of my role, as a teacher, in addressing the issue. I was also introduced to a second researcher working in the area of bullying. Dr. Zopito Marini, a guest lecturer, was a dynamic speaker on the topic of bullying. I left*

*class that night feeling really excited about the antibullying initiative we were participating in.*

*I wanted my staff to feel the way I did when I left class that night. I wanted them to understand the importance of our initiative, and I wanted them to take in the information in a way that was not overwhelming. I invited my professor and the guest lecturer to come to speak to the staff at my school.*

*The day Dr. Bosacki and Dr. Marini were to arrive at my school, I felt a mixture of emotions. I was excited for them to come and share their knowledge of bullying. I was also nervous. What was I thinking inviting researchers to speak to my staff? I wondered if the teachers at my school would feel the excitement as I did, or would they feel resentment towards outsiders coming in to tell them what they should be doing?*

*The meeting was a success! The staff talked about that day for a long time. Information was shared, and the work that had been done in our school was congratulated. It was the ideal way to bring research and teachers together.*

### **Restatement of the Problem and Overview of the Chapter**

Elementary teachers around the world have to contend with the problem of bullying facing their students, in their classrooms, and in their schools (Barone, 1997; Charach et al., 1995; Craig et al., 2000; Eslea, 1998; Pepler, 2006; Rigby et al., 2004). It may be addressing the concerns of students and parents after the media reports on the tragic events of a bullying incident or dealing with a call to learn about what the school's policy is on bullying, or even worse, witnessing bullying firsthand or hearing a child share a story about being excluded, teased, or harassed. Numerous programs addressing many different types of bullying have been developed over the past decade to help

teachers and schools tackle the problem of bullying. How do teachers feel about the programs? Are the programs easy to implement in conjunction with curriculum expectations? Do teachers have enough information regarding the problem of bullying to address the needs of their students? This research explores the lived experiences and perceptions of elementary school teachers participating in antibullying initiatives at their respective school sites. The students attending these schools range in age from 4 to 14 years.

It was my hope that by exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of elementary school teachers involved in antibullying initiatives this study would further the discussion on peer bullying and victimization. Participants in this study benefited from the opportunity to reflect on their initiative and share their knowledge after implementing an antibullying program. It was only after I was asked to reflect on my experiences in initiating an antibullying program that I saw all of the successes that we achieved. The demands placed on teachers today are huge, and this often does not include time to celebrate when goals are accomplished. After being given the time to share their lived experiences and perceptions, I hoped the teachers celebrated their accomplishments and left the interview with a new outlook on their initiative. Time to reflect and gain positive insights into the work teachers are tackling is not always readily available. Participants had some time to see where they had been and what they had achieved. I also wanted the readers of this research to continue to share their experiences and knowledge and persist in their fight to address the problem of bullying. Finally, I wanted teachers who read this research, who are not involved in antibullying initiatives,

to see the importance and take steps to stop peer bullying and victimization from happening to students in their schools.

This chapter describes the research methodology. It describes how the participants were selected and where the research was carried out. The instrumentation used to collect the data as well as reasons for how the data were analyzed are also discussed. After addressing the limitations and the ethical considerations, the chapter concludes with a summary of the most important points discussed.

### **Research Approach and Design**

This research was qualitative in its approach. Creswell (2002) states “qualitative research examines a research problem in which the inquirer explores and seeks to understand a central phenomenon” (p. 52). The research presented focused on teachers’ lived experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of antibullying programs. Past literature clearly shows that with effective intervention bullying can be reduced. Yet we continue to see evidence of bullying at schools and in media reports. This research aims to further our understanding concerning what teachers know about bullying and victimization in schools and what they are doing to address the problem. This research highlighted “the participant’s view, described it within a setting or context (e.g., a classroom), and explored the meaning people personally hold for educational issues” (Creswell, p. 49). I incorporated a qualitative research approach so that my participants could share their lived experiences and perceptions in the format of individual stories and have their stories included in the research regarding bullying.

This study followed a multiple case study design. Creswell (1998) states that this design is intended to be “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple

cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple data sources of information rich in context” (p.61). The “bounded system” or activity (Creswell) focused on in this study was the participation of elementary school teachers in an antibullying initiative, specifically their lived experiences and their perceptions of the “Imagine...A School Without Bullying” antibullying initiative.

The first reason for selecting a case study design was the awareness of this type of research by my future readers. Case studies appear in many disciplines. Psychologists, doctors, lawyers, and political scientists all incorporate case studies as a means of sharing information (Creswell, 1998). As a teacher, I have prepared case studies about my students when I attend meetings with other colleagues looking for advice on how to address concerns my students may be experiencing. The case study format is a familiar, nonthreatening means of presenting information. Readers are not bombarded with statistics and data that are difficult to interpret. They read accounts of the participant’s experiences, their successes, and their challenges. Presenting the information in this manner allows the reader to make a connection to the research. My goal is that teachers will read this research and learn about the importance of addressing bullying in their schools.

The second reason for selecting this research design was the openness of the format for reporting the data in case study research (Merriam, 1998). Although this research will not generate a particular theory, it will explore, describe, and analyze the lived experiences of teachers who are attempting to deal with the problem of bullying and victimization in their respective schools. Each case study is presented as an individual story. Bullying and victimization is a complex social problem affecting the relationships

between people. Bullying is not about numbers or statistics; it is about a victim, a bully (or bully-victim), and any bystanders that witness or participate in the events. Teachers who have implemented antibullying programs have stories to share. They have stories that describe their journey, their challenges, and their successes. When a group of teachers get together, they do not swap statistics from the week; they share stories. Graves (1998) said it best. "Stories reach for the essential elements. They reintroduce the human into our profession" (p. 4). This research introduced the lived experiences of teachers working on antibullying initiatives to the current research that exists on bullying.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants for this study were selected based on their involvement in the "Imagine...A School Without Bullying" initiative or its predecessor, "Good Kid Sid." Creswell (2002) refers to this type of sampling as "purposeful sampling" (p. 194). Purposeful sampling (Creswell) allows researchers to select specific individuals and or sites to better understand a central phenomenon. This type of sampling allowed me to select teachers that participated in the "Good Kid Sid" pilot project or the "Imagine" initiative to better understand their lived experiences and perceptions of bullying and victimization after implementing an antibullying initiative. I, having participated in the pilot project, decided to include myself in this study as one of the 5 participants.

The timing of my research was problematic. By the time I received clearance from Brock's Research Ethics Board (see Appendix) to precede with my research, it was late April. I sent my Letter of Introduction, along with a Letter of Invitation, to 10 principals who work in schools that had implemented the "Good Kid Sid" or "Imagine"

antibullying initiatives. I received one response to my participant request. That interview took place during the last week of school (June 2006).

Teachers rely on strong networks with colleagues to assist them in their jobs. I incorporated Creswell's (2002) "snowball sampling" into my participant selection (p. 196). Snowball sampling (Creswell) occurs once a study has begun; it is a form of purposeful sampling where, by word of mouth participants are recommended to the study. I was quickly given the names of 2 other teachers who had implemented the antibullying programs that I was targeting. I sent Letters of Invitation to each of the teachers and received two more responses to participate in my research. These interviews took place in July and August 2006. In September 2006, through snowball sampling (Creswell), I received my final participant; the interview, as well as my own interview, took place later that month.

Future researchers, involving teachers in their research, will want to consider the timing of their research and how it relates to the workloads and schedules of the teachers they plan to interview. Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2002) also made finding participants challenging. Not all schools in this board participated in the "Good Kid Sid" or the "Imagine" program, so the number of potential participants was limited from the start.

### **Participants**

The teachers in this research were involved in the "Imagine...A School Without Bullying" initiative or the "Good Kid Sid" pilot project. Each participant chose or was given a pseudonym and the names of their respective schools were omitted. Three of the 5 participants were female. Three taught in primary classrooms (K-3), 1 taught in a



junior classroom, and 1 taught in a special education congregated class. Collectively, they have 50 years of teaching experience and 11 years of involvement with an antibullying initiative. Refer to Table 1.

The 5 participants, in this study were from five different schools. A multisite study (Creswell, 1998) was chosen to represent the diverse array of teachers' voices and experiences while implementing their antibullying initiative. Participants were chosen from a variety of sites representing the various socioeconomic and ethnic diversities found in a southern Ontario public school board. Each case is presented in Chapter Four as an individual story.

### **Research Setting and Context**

Participants in this study reflected on and shared stories of their involvement in an antibullying initiative. I opted to allow my participants to select the site where the one-on-one interviews took place. The only caution I made was to advise them of the need for the environment to be quiet, so that their stories could be recorded on audiotape. The setting needed to be comfortable for the participant, a place where they were relaxed and free to talk about their experiences. This ensured they had every opportunity to share their story using as much detail as possible.

Two of the interviews took place at the participants' school sites. One of these interviews (Skippy) was in the participant's classroom. This allowed me the opportunity to record some field notes about what the initiative looks like in their school. The second school interview (Andrea) took place in her school library. The third interview took place at a restaurant (Natalie). As this was one of my summer interviews, it met the

Table 1

Chart Documenting Teaching Assignments and Teaching Experience from Each Participant

| Pseudonym | Gender | Teaching assignment                              | Years of teaching | Experience with initiative |
|-----------|--------|--|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Skippy    | Male   | Primary (K-3)                                    | 15                | 3 years                    |
| Natalie   | Female | Junior (4-6) special education congregated class | 18                | 3 years                    |
| William   | Male   | Primary (K-3)                                    | 3                 | 1 year                     |
| Andrea    | Female | Junior (4-6)                                     | 4                 | 1 year                     |
| Lulu      | Female | Primary (K-3)                                    | 10                | 3 years                    |

needs of my participant. The only problem with this venue was the noise. We sat outside, due to limited seating inside, and the traffic occasionally made it difficult to hear. I asked the participant to repeat what was said when it became noisy. The final two interviews (Lulu and William) took place at my home. This was a mutual decision between the participants and me.

I provided my participants with the open-ended and closed-ended questions prior to our meeting. This allowed them the opportunity to see the direction I was heading in with my research questions. It allowed the participants to answer the closed-ended questions before the interview, thus making the best use of their time. I made sure that the participants knew they could opt out of any of the questions or the research, and that their identities would remain anonymous.

### **Data Collection**

The one-on-one interviews were semistructured. Prior to the interview, participants received and were asked to fill out the answers to eight closed-ended questions. These questions pertained to participant and school demographics. This method was incorporated to be mindful of the participants' time. Responses were collected at the time of the interview. Participants, in a one-time interview, were then asked open-ended questions where they were free to express their own responses (Creswell, 2002). The questions were designed to explore the journey teachers took as they worked to address the problem of peer bullying and victimization in their schools. The interviews were audiotaped so I would be able to transcribe the information at a later time, and brief notes were taken based on the interview protocol as described in *Educational Research* (Creswell, 2002). These notes captured descriptive and reflective

thoughts from the interview and were used in conjunction with the transcribed information to provide a rich description of my participants' experiences.

The length of the interview depended on the conversation that unfolded as the questions were asked. I needed to ask for some clarification in all of my interviews, and I also asked some more probing questions, as recommended by Creswell (2002), when their responses required me to elicit greater detail regarding their experiences.

Participants were advised that interviews would last approximately one hour. Actual interviews lasted anywhere between 35 and 55 minutes. Andrea's and Williams's interviews were the shortest (35 minutes and 30 minutes respectively). Both participants had only one year of experience with the "Imagine" antibullying initiative. Andrea transferred to the school a year after the implementation of the initiative and left a year later; therefore she opted out of some of the research questions (How did your school become involved with the "Imagine...A School Without Bullying" initiative? and How do you see your initiative evolving over the next few years?). William's school was just beginning the initiative, and some questions were difficult to answer because his school was in the initial stages of implementation. Skippy, Natalie, and Lulu had spent 3 years with the initiative at their respective schools. Lulu's interview was the longest (55 minutes), William's was next at 44 minutes, and Natalie's was 39 minutes long. Interestingly, Lulu's school and William's school both involved their students with regular school-wide assemblies. Both participants expressed the need to permeate the culture of their respective schools.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis is a process in which the researcher becomes very familiar with the stories of the participants. In the initial phases of this process, the researcher begins to understand or make sense of the data (Creswell, 2002). I chose to transcribe the audiotaped data. This gave me the opportunity to sift through the journeys of my participants several times before any actual analysis occurred. This process allowed me to reflect on their stories and make preliminary notes on the information I read.

Reflections on the transcriptions of the audiotapes provided me with the opportunity to relive the experiences my participants had while implementing the antibullying programs at their school sites. I had some personal reflections recorded on my initial interpretations of the data that I included with my transcripts. From here, I began coding the data. Coding the data is a process where I looked for broad themes (Creswell, 2002) that could be found across all five of my case studies. Prior knowledge of bullying, what the initiative looks like at each school, successes, challenges, available resources, and advice to others wanting to implement an antibullying initiative were themes highlighted from the research questions. From here, the broad themes were reduced to a smaller number of topics, where a more in-depth analysis occurred. The global impact of bullying, the need for a supportive administration, and time were subthemes that surfaced over and over again in my analysis. This process allowed me to sequence the data so that it could be summarized and presented in Chapter Four of this research.

Participants in this research were purposely selected from different schools to present different perspectives on the implementation of antibullying programs. As stated

earlier in this research, bullying is a complex social issue. Even though the schools in this research are implementing the same antibullying initiative, their experiences varied. Different students and teachers create different social relationships. My intention was that the readers of this paper would connect to the specific demographics of one school but benefit from the common themes that arose from the data. Therefore, as well as presenting reoccurring themes in the data, I described the journey each of my participants took as they dealt with peer bullying and victimization in their schools. Chapter Four will include five separate stories, each outlining the lived experiences of one of my participants. Then similar themes will be discussed and finally, connections and links to the present literature on bullying will be presented.

### **Assumptions**

I was a participant in the “Good Kid Sid” pilot project. I sat on a committee that made recommendations for the “Imagine...A School Without Bullying” document. I believe antibullying initiatives impact bullying and victimization under the right conditions: proper training for teachers, the support of the administration, and time. These assumptions affect how I listened to and recorded the stories of my participants.

### **Limitations**

My intent when selecting this research topic was to expand the current research on bullying by including the lived experiences of teachers who are implementing an antibullying program. Peer bullying and victimization is a problem facing schools today. Teachers play an important role in dealing with this problem (Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 1995; Rigby, 1998). One of the limitations of this research is the validity of my findings. How accurate is the information that I am presenting? This concern is easily

addressed by incorporating member-checking into my analysis. "Member-checking is a process where the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2002, p. 280). Each of my participants was given a copy of the transcription of their interview and asked to verify my representation of their experiences. Changes or omissions were made as requested by participants. One of my participants commented on a grammatical mistake, but no participant asked for any content to be changed or removed. The process of changing information presented in the transcripts was done via email.

A second limitation in this research is the sheer size of this study. I reported on the findings of five case studies in addressing the experiences of implementing an antibullying initiative at an elementary school level. The goal of this research was to explore the phenomena of implementing an initiative to address peer bullying and victimization and to add to the current research. Even though the numbers are small, the stories are rich in descriptive qualities and allow readers to share in their experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The greatest ethical consideration for this research is protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. At the time of consent, all participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used for each individual and their school site. Transcripts were kept in my office in a locked drawer, and participants were given the option of having all correspondence done via regular mail or email. All participants chose to communicate via email.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has outlined the approach I took when collecting and analyzing the data I audiotaped during my interviews. A case study approach was selected because it allowed me to explore the journeys each of my participants took as they implemented an antibullying program. Individuals and their experiences differ. This research will present a description of each participant, their school, and their initiative as well as similar themes that reoccurred as I poured over their stories. Chapter Four will present the findings from my interviews and make connections to the present research on bullying. Listen to the lived experiences of 5 teachers as they work towards addressing the complex social issue of peer bullying and victimization in their schools.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

*I can remember a conversation I had with a guest speaker after his presentation at our school. He had been invited as part of our literacy week, and at the end of the day, I was checking in to see how his second presentation went. During the first presentation, the session I attended, the children were glued to his every move. Their eyes followed him, and you could have heard a pin drop. When it came time for questions, the students waited patiently and were insightful with their comments. The first thing the speaker commented on in our conversation was the school's atmosphere. He said he noticed it when he walked through the door. He did not elaborate on what he meant; he just stated that the students seemed happy and ready and willing to hear what he had to say. He seemed impressed. I could not wait to share this with our staff. This is what we have been working for. This speaker is in schools all the time, and he was not asked to comment on our climate; he chose to. Our work towards changing our school climate and changing our students' attitudes when relating to one another was working. The anti-bullying initiative we were implementing was making a difference.*

### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will present the stories of 5 teachers who have experience with the “Good Kid Sid” pilot program or the “Imagine... A School Without Bullying” program. Two of the teachers that were interviewed were male, and 3 were female. Collectively they represent 50 years of teaching experience. Three of the 5 teachers continued to be involved with the program. However, 2 of the teachers have moved to schools without any antibullying initiative in place. Their stories described their awareness of bullying prior to beginning the antibullying initiative, what the program looked like at their

school, their challenges, and their successes. Each of the 5 teachers interviewed also offered some advice to anyone interested in starting an antibullying initiative of their own. This chapter also addresses the five research questions posed in Chapter One.

### **Skippy's Story**

Skippy has been teaching for 15 years. At the time of the interview he was a primary teacher and was in his third year with the “Imagine” program. He was a member of the committee that oversaw the running of the initiative and was therefore very familiar with the program and its effects on his school’s community. Skippy’s school is a large school. There are over 450 students from junior kindergarten to grade 6. The population is very diverse, with a medium to high socioeconomic status. The parents are involved with the school and the school’s initiatives.

Prior to his involvement in this antibullying initiative, Skippy was aware of bullying and its effects on students. He spoke of working at schools where you had to look with your “eyes, ears, and heart” (interview, June 2006). Skippy felt strongly about the need for kids to be safe in order for them to learn. “If kids don’t feel safe, they’re not going to learn” (interview, June 2006). He stressed his job included teaching the whole child and not just imparting the curriculum. As I glanced around his classroom, his philosophy on teaching was evident in the room. Positive affirmations and children’s work covered the walls. It was not an overly stimulating room, but more welcoming and safe. As I spoke with Skippy about the antibullying initiative, I did not feel this was his job from 8 to 5, but that it was more of a passion and part of what made him the teacher that he was.

Skippy's school is a relatively new school. This meant the staff that opened the school had a big part in forming the school's culture, its identity. "The staff here was pretty much hand-picked. There was an honest enthusiasm, there was a great momentum" (interview, June 2006). The school's climate committee decided what direction the school would go in. "As a school, we decided what we were going to do and where we were going to take things" (interview, June 2006). After attending an introductory session, the vice-principal initiated the conversation about becoming a part of the "Imagine" program. Initially, a small group on staff was approached with the idea, and then the entire staff was informed about becoming a part of the "Imagine" program. A group of teachers from the climate committee went to the "Imagine" training sessions and were then responsible for implementing the "Imagine" framework at their school.

Skippy and his committee felt making staff and students aware of bullying and what it entails was important. There was some resistance from staff members about the need for an antibullying initiative. Some felt it was not necessary. Skippy stated that "if we start with the kids, at the same time, the staff is going to be hearing the same message" (interview, June 2006). He wanted everyone to know the importance of making students feel safe at school. Another important element was the communication within the school, communication between staff and administration, staff members, students, and staff and students. "Improving communication" (interview, June 2006) was a goal for this initiative. He felt communication between his administration and the staff could be improved upon. "We've had some issues, some vertical communication issues" (interview, June 2006). He chose not to elaborate any further but felt this initiative could be the catalyst to open lines of communication, especially when it involved the well-

being of the students. Skippy's school addressed these concerns by implementing whole-school assemblies. The first period each Monday was reserved for a school-wide assembly. "Without any identified regular school time, there was no way to influence the culture" (interview, June 2006). This weekly assembly allowed staff to become as informed as their students about the information being introduced. Skippy also pointed out that anyone with some hesitation concerning the changes was still going to be present and hear the message.

Classrooms wrote covenants outlining their rights and responsibilities within the school. These were signed by the students and their parents and then posted to remind everyone of their promise. Class cheers were also created and shared throughout the year during the weekly assembly. By the last week of school, all classes had shared a cheer. "We had an assembly this week, and every class had a cheer!" (interview, June 2006).

The school chose to celebrate individual successes on a display board as well as allowing the whole school to celebrate when targets were met. Assemblies took on the feel of game shows, news reports, and skits. Each week a new topic was discussed, telling verses tattling, diversity, and problem solving to name a few. Teachers were also provided with materials to further the discussion during class time, sometimes in the form of class meetings. The committee used some of the lessons from the "Imagine" guide. "We tried to take this huge binder called the 'Imagine' program and get it down to something remotely manageable" (interview, June 2006). As a committee, they recognized how overwhelmed the staff would be with too much information regarding bullying. The committee often scaled down the information and tailored it to the topic they had selected for the week.

During Skippy's time with the initiative, his school faced a number of administration changes. At one point one of the administrators wanted some data that the work they were doing was making a difference. So a survey was given to the students. Skippy referred to the survey as a "soft data survey" (interview, June 2006) which was designed by the committee. The questions on the survey were to elicit information about where they were and about the differences they had made so far. It was administered in the fall initially and had just been completed again, at the end of the school year. The current results had not been tabulated. Skippy admitted the survey would need some "tweaking for our school" (interview, June 2006). The committee felt that some wording might need to be changed for future use, so the survey remains a work in process. However, everyone will admit that fewer problems are ending up at the office. Students are able to work them out, or teachers are able to intervene and assist. The common message during school assemblies and class meetings is providing students with the tools needed to handle problems as they arise.

Skippy spoke positively about his school and the initiative. He commented that staff new to the school said it was an "amazing" place to work. He said "it is great and it's not perfect" (interview, June 2006). He did not have the notion to leave something that was not broken; instead, he wanted to take something that was good and make it even better. The committee that was responsible for implementing the initiative had a major responsibility. "We meet every Monday after school, as a committee. It's a heavy-duty time commitment. We usually meet for a couple of hours" (interview, June 2006). This does not include the time required to prepare for assemblies.

One of the challenges that face this committee is the notion of the word bullying. Skippy commented that people joining the staff could not believe an antibullying initiative is in place. Some staff felt the reference to bullying has a negative spin and they would prefer to focus on the positive aspects that are seen throughout the school. “It doesn’t make sense that you are going to have this huge focus on bullying; it just seems so negative” (interview, June 2006). Skippy’s solution was to “have the focus [bullying], but we’ll accentuate the positive” (interview, June 2006). Setbacks and negative feedback did not seem to diminish his passion. He felt strongly about the program and wanted it to succeed.

A second challenge is the momentum. Some members of the committee feel that weekly meetings are a must, whereas others feel that it could be scaled down to every other week. Skippy stressed the fact that if people are on board with the messages being imparted and are continuing the discussions within their classrooms, the number of meetings per month may not be as important. “It is all about commitment. If people are committed and on board, you could do it once a month. It’s not about the assemblies, it’s about the people” (interview, June 2006). Skippy, with some frustration, pointed out that the entire school does not participate in the program. There were certain junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten classes that opted out of assemblies depending on the topic being discussed. “Two out of five classes have chosen to come. Three just thought, you know, it’s just *too long* for the little guys to sit there” (interview, June 2006).

Skippy’s advice to anyone looking to start an antibullying initiative was simple.

Make sure you have a committed core group of staff and that you have the buy-in and commitment of time from administration. And to really take this forward and really make it permeate your culture, you need to have face time in front of the whole school, and then the staff and the community (interview, June 2006).

Skippy's final thoughts were, "if you build a strong foundation on the house, you have to spend less time on maintenance" (interview, June 2006). Using his analogy, an antibullying program is the foundation. If schools take the time to make staff and students aware of bullying and how to handle it when they see it, they may spend less time in the future dealing with the consequences of bullying. Skippy felt strongly that if we as teachers were committed to living by our message, so too would our students.

### **Natalie's Story**

Natalie has been teaching for 18 years. At the time of the interview she was a junior teacher working in a self-contained classroom with special education students and was in her third year with the "Imagine" program. She was a member of the committee that oversaw the running of the initiative and was therefore very familiar with the program and its effects on her school's community. Natalie's school is a medium-sized school. There are between 300 and 450 students from junior kindergarten to grade 6. The population is very diverse, with a low socioeconomic status. The parents' involvement with the school and the school's initiatives is limited.

Prior to participating in the "Imagine" program, Natalie was aware that bullying existed. As a parent, she had watched as her children experienced it, and as a teacher she assumed there were a couple of bullies and people on the receiving end at every school. It was not until her school completed a bullying survey that she realized the magnitude of

the problem. "I was totally flabbergasted at the results of the survey we'd given the kids about how much bullying was going on" (interview, July 2006). Natalie quickly learned about the underground nature of bullying and that it was occurring in places that she did not expect. Students reported that bullying was happening during transition times and in the washrooms. Natalie noted that these were places that teachers were not really supervising.

Natalie stated she was unsure how the school became involved with the initiative but recalls the administration bringing it up at a staff meeting and the staff agreeing to participate. She commented on the transient nature of her population and tough reputation that her school had. Natalie's school had a lot of programs in place to deal with the students' behaviour and took the framework of the "Imagine" program and adapted it to fit with what was already working. The "Imagine" program was not going to replace anything the school was previously doing, it was just going to add "some more depth to what we already had going on" (interview, July 2006). For instance, instead of running their welcome to school activities during the first week of school, the activities during the first week now had an antibullying focus. Natalie described awards handed out to students who were caught doing the right thing. The awards now included some information about the specific act that was being rewarded and they also became more substantial. Instead of a piece of paper, the award was now mounted on cardboard, and it was something that all students, including those in the older grades, aspired to get. The awards are handed out monthly by the school mascot, and parents now know exactly what their child did to receive the award. "I thought it would have been a big deal for the grade 1s (receiving an award) but it was also a big deal for the grade 6s" (interview, July



2006). This slight change to the existing program provided parents with information about the antibullying initiative in a nonthreatening manner. Remember that in Natalie's school parental involvement is limited. By sending home an award with the expectations of the new initiative, it allows parents to become informed as well as allowing them to celebrate in their child's accomplishments. "In a way, they [the parents] are involved with the program because their kids are educating them" (interview, July 2006).

Natalie's school also created a committee that met once a month. The committee was responsible for reading through the "Imagine" document and developing a list of expectations for the school. They then created a plan to introduce and teach the expectations to the staff and students. The committee modeled lessons taken from the "Imagine" document that other staff could use in their classrooms and devoted a staff meeting to introduce class meetings and how to run one. Each class was also asked to create an agreement based on how they wanted to be treated. Although the content of the agreements was similar, it was up to each class to decide how they were going to personalize their agreement. The agreements were laminated and posted in the hallways. However, they were not merely decoration, they were a teaching tool. "When we had a problem, we would take the agreement down and bring it in and say OK, this is our problem, by looking at our class agreement can we find a solution?" (interview, July 2006). The students used their own words to help them in solving problems that arose.

Natalie had a lot of positive things to say about how easily the "Imagine" framework blended into her school's existing programs. However, there were some challenges. The positive gains made by the students, their ability to work through problems using a common language, their ability to identify bullying, and a reduction in

bullying incidents took a lot of time. Results were not seen until well into their second year, so a lot of patience was required. Some members of Natalie's staff also challenged the time commitment of the initiative. "Some of the teachers, especially our grades 5 and 6 teachers, were not happy about having to take time away from other curriculum areas" (interview, July 2006). A lot of curriculum time is lost when the first week is devoted to antibullying, when class meetings become a weekly expectation, and reviewing the common language and the tools needed to tackle bullying needs to be constantly reviewed. Teachers began to question if there is a point when certain grades no longer have to participate in the initiative. If it is taught in grade 1, 2, and 3, does it need to be continued in grades 4, 5, and 6, especially with the ever-increasing demands of the curriculum?

The second challenge was how to keep new staff up to date with the initiative. New students were sent to the child and youth worker, who informed them about the initiative, what it looks like, and how it works at the school. But new teachers were a little trickier. Natalie said, "they have to come along through their conversations with other teachers" (interview, 2006). She hoped that teachers were discussing the initiative with new staff and that they (new staff) would be able to learn what was needed in order to implement the program within their classroom.

Natalie's advice to anyone looking to start an antibullying initiative was simple. She felt you need a group of staff willing to form a committee, oversee the initiative, create a plan, and help get the message across to the rest of the staff and the students. Natalie's committee was willing to model lessons done in their classroom to others on staff. Natalie also felt that "teachers have to take ownership of the program, and that

makes the program work” (interview, July 2006). She felt the “Imagine” framework allowed her school to maintain programs in place but improve upon them. The training and support provided by the Health Department and the opportunity to network with other schools implementing the program were also extremely valuable. During networking sessions, Natalie’s committee was able to see how other schools were implementing the “Imagine” program. This allowed them to take interesting ideas and alter them to fit the needs of their students and their school community. She also felt strongly that the administration played a key role in having a successful program. She felt that without their support, the program would not be possible. Finally, Natalie stated the changes did not happen overnight. “It took a couple of years to really take off” (interview, July 2006). But once it was ingrained in the culture, “we started to notice far fewer problems out on the schoolyard” (interview, July 2006).

Natalie admitted that in hindsight, “I did not really understand what bullying was. I mean, what’s the difference between a schoolyard fight and bullying?” (interview, July 2006). Her participation in the “Imagine” program allowed her to become informed on the issue of bullying. “I think the biggest lesson [that I learned] is that antibullying programs really work!” (interview, July 2006).

### **William’s Story**

William has been teaching for 3 years. At the time of the interview he was a primary teacher and had just completed his initial year with the “Imagine” program. His first year included three training sessions provided by the Health Department and some time to experiment with the “Imagine” lesson plans provided by the initiative. William was also responsible for sharing the information he gained in the training with his staff,

organizing the materials they would need to begin implementing the program, and helping to decide what the program would actually look like at his school. William's school is a medium sized school. There are between 300 and 450 students from junior kindergarten to grade 6. The population is somewhat diverse, with a medium to high socioeconomic status. The parents are actively involved within the school setting. However there was no parental involvement in the "Imagine" program at the time of the interview due to the newness of the initiative.

Prior to his involvement in this antibullying initiative, William regretfully admitted that he assumed bullying was a part of growing up. "I thought bullying was just a reality of growing up" (interview, August 2006). He believed bullying and bullies were always going to exist and that some people were just better equipped to handle them than others. William believed "bullying was a fact of life!" (interview, August 2006).

His school became involved with the "Imagine" program as a means of fulfilling their School Success Plan. Every year, schools within his board complete or update their School Success Plan. The plan must address the board's priorities, which are linked to learning and caring. Each school must submit a plan that has a minimum of two and no more than three overall goals. One of the goals must address improving student learning, and another must address the environment or culture of the school (a caring priority). Schools not only list their overall goals but a rationale for each goal. The rationale ensures the goal is directly related to the needs of each individual school and their students. The plan must also include specific goals under the overall learning and caring goals as well as the actions and the strategies the school will take in order to achieve their goals. There is also a section that identifies who is responsible for each part of the plan

and how it will be communicated to the staff, the students, and the community.

William's principal felt being involved with the "Imagine" program would help the school meet the requirements for their School Success Plan.

As was previously stated, the initiative was in its beginning stages. William went through the "Imagine" lesson plans and pulled out lessons that would introduce the school to the initiative. "It's nice to have a user-friendly package" (interview, August 2006). The staff's reactions to the lesson plans were mixed. Some staff had not even bothered to go through the plans, while others found the information overwhelming, and finally, there was staff that appreciated having the information and the activities already set out for them. William, being a relatively new teacher, found the premade lessons extremely user-friendly. "It's amazing that we have these premade lessons," he said (interview, August 2006). Teachers are responsible for covering a lot of curriculum and having the premade antibullying lessons meant there was not a lot of work to be done on the part of the teacher. William felt the scripted dialogue helped him with the background information that he would not have had if the teaching were left solely up to him.

The school invested in a number of guest speakers. William stated that incorporating outside agencies to come in and put on a skit or deliver an antibullying message meant that all staff was receiving a common message. It was a nonthreatening way for staff and students to become more aware of the issue. He felt a lot of conversations were held in classrooms after the assemblies and that a dialogue about bullying was beginning to occur. "We had a really silly, over-the-top dramatic presentation on bullying. But it had a fantastic message, which was something that we

could bring back to the classroom and discuss, whether we were in kindergarten or grade 6" (interview, August 2006).

The Health Department also provided schools with articles dealing with the issues surrounding bullying. William's school uses "the articles for their newsletter" (interview, August 2006). The purpose of their newsletters was to inform their parents about the bullying issues being discussed at school. This is a school where parents are involved. William felt that if parents were made aware of the issues surrounding bullying, they would be more than happy to get involved when the initiative was further along.

William spoke enthusiastically about the "Imagine" program. Even though his time with the initiative was limited, he observed changes in his students. "I think they [his students] are empowered just with the language and knowing about bullying" (interview, August 2006). He believed the program would work, the challenge that faced him was convincing his staff that this was not a fad, and that his school would see positive changes if they all got behind the initiative.

William stated his principal challenge initially was the denial that bullying existed. "I would say some of our staff truly believe there has never been an incident of bullying [at our school]" (interview, August 2006). Some staff felt the program would benefit schools that had a bullying problem, but why put in all of the effort required by the program if bullying was not an issue at their school? He spoke fondly of his school and the community in which it is situated, saying it is "the best school in the world" (interview, August 2006). The playground was not rough, and there were not a lot of physical altercations. If time and resources are put into this initiative something else will suffer. With all of the demands facing teachers, some of his staff questioned the

relevance of this program to their current situation. The principal felt differently. Next year all staff will be conducting class meetings and working through the grade-specific lesson plans. The school was moving ahead with the “Imagine” program and the staff was going to have to become comfortable with it.

William felt that if his staff could have listened to the information that he heard during his training, they would have gotten on board more quickly with the initiative. He felt inspired by the speakers at his training sessions: “Let’s go forward and ... conquer this battle against bullying!” (interview, August 2006). He also learned a lot about bullying, what it looks like, and how it affects all of the students, not just those immediately involved in the problem. “They [the Health Department] were really good at answering questions and really good at convincing people this is something worth doing” (interview, August 2006). William admitted his excitement towards the program was difficult to convey to seasoned staff that had witnessed many initiatives come and go throughout the years. “I’m not the best motivational speaker to get them on board,” he said (interview, August 2006).

In his short time with the information and materials, William did see some positive changes in his students. He made the students aware of bullying and held discussions about what the kids saw on the playground and what they would like to see. He was creating a common language with his students and making them aware of what constituted bullying. He felt his students were becoming more concerned with how their peers were feeling. They started giving compliments and problem solving when issues arose. William felt some of this was done when he was looking, but he knew it was a start. “You have to keep reteaching it and keep revisiting the subject [bullying], I think

that is really key” (interview, August 2006). His students were beginning to care for one another, and he could build upon this. He knew that change would not happen overnight.

William’s advice to anyone starting an antibullying initiative is simple.

Introduce it slowly, “don’t expect it to happen overnight, and don’t get discouraged”

(interview, August 2006). A lot of time during staff meetings was devoted to discussing bullying. Staff needed to become informed and aware that bullying did exist. They also needed time to adapt. This initiative was not just a fad, it was here to stay, and it was going to benefit all of their students. Antibullying initiatives make staff and students aware of what bullying is and how they can play a role in preventing it from happening.

“It’s not just about the bullies, it’s about everyone else” (interview, August 2006).

William thinks there is still a part of him that believes bullies will always exist.

However, if he can provide his students with the tools to tackle the problem and a common language to discuss how they are feeling, William believes his students will be a lot happier and safer throughout their lives.

### **Andrea’s Story**

Andrea has been teaching for 4 years. At the time of the interview she was a junior teacher and had just completed her first full year with the “Imagine” program. She was a member of the committee that oversaw the running of the initiative and was therefore very familiar with the program and its effects on her school’s community.

Andrea’s school is a medium-sized school. There are between 300 and 450 students from junior kindergarten to grade 8. The population is not very diverse, with a medium socioeconomic status. The parents are extremely involved with the school and the school’s initiatives.



Prior to her involvement in this antibullying initiative, Andrea believed wholeheartedly that bullying was a major concern in our schools and that not enough was being done to prevent it from occurring. She knew that there were many forms of bullying and that it was not limited to physical acts. She also knew that both boys and girls participated.

Andrea had a personal connection to bullying. "I was bullied a lot growing up, and my children have suffered from being bullied" (interview, September 2006). Initially, Andrea did not believe teachers were equipped to deal with the problem and that they often chose to ignore it. "When I was being bullied, teachers didn't do much about it, and when my kids were bullied it was never resolved to my satisfaction" (interview, September 2006). However, after spending 4 years as a teacher, she has a different viewpoint. Andrea admits it is sometimes a struggle to deal with bullying issues as well as the other elements of her job. She stated that the time spent in the classroom is busy and that some problems do not always receive the attention they deserve. "I understand how you can have those days when you just say go to your corners and forget about it, because there is too much going on" (interview, September 2006). Andrea struggles with this dilemma because she is aware that students do not do their best learning if they do not feel safe, but she questions how it all fits into the school day.

Andrea's principal, who also had a personal connection to bullying, initiated their involvement in the "Imagine" program. The principal approached certain staff and selected the Imagine committee members. Andrea had previously discussed her thoughts on bullying with the principal and felt this was why she was chosen. Unlike the other three schools, Andrea's school also sent parents to the "Imagine" training sessions. "We

were really lucky, we had two parents that wanted to be on the 'Imagine' committee" (interview, September 2006).

During their first year with the initiative, the committee attended the training sessions. The students completed a questionnaire regarding incidents, locations, and frequency of bullying, and lessons from the manual provided were implemented by some staff. The committee spent a lot of time trying to create an acronym, using their school's name, describing how the students should behave in accordance with their antibullying initiative. Andrea's committee initially sought student support, "but maybe three or four classes did it" (interview, September 2006); she said, "that's sort of indicative of the level of support for the program" (interview, September 2006). Posters were eventually created and displayed around the school to act as a reminder. Guest speakers were also brought in to address the topic. The goal for the first year was to complete the training, and get "kids talking about bullying and thinking about it" (interview, September 2006).

Prior to her training, Andrea believed half of the students were bullied and the other half bullied. She was surprised to learn that the majority of the students were in fact bystanders and that the bystander could play an important role in stopping bullying from occurring. Andrea was determined to make sure her students knew the importance of the bystander and how, if they wanted to, they could make a difference. She wanted her students to feel empowered, something she never felt. After a lot of conversations and discussions about the role of the bystander, Andrea said, "I actually challenged them one day" (interview, September 2006) to see if they could have a positive impact on a problem that was occurring. She told her students they were not to look for trouble but that if they saw something happening they should see if they could stop it from

escalating. “See if what you do or say can have an impact” (interview, September 2006). Many students reported back that it had worked. Her class spent the next while tracking the incidents they saw and how they made a difference. Andrea noticed the change in her students. She said, “they stood taller” (interview, September 2006). They knew they played an important role in the school’s climate, and they wanted to make a difference.

The positive change that Andrea saw within her students did not occur as quickly with the staff. She felt her principal challenge was “trying to get them to see the benefit [of an antibullying initiative]” (interview, September 2006). Andrea’s intimate connection to bullying assured her this initiative was worthwhile for students. However, she believes that if you have never experienced bullying, you cannot understand the impact that it has on your everyday life, and that your learning can be affected if you are worrying about what might happen next. Andrea felt a lot of staff believed the myths surrounding bullying, boys will be boys, and that some kids just need to toughen up. “I think there is a difference in people who have been bullied. They really get the importance of how learning is affected if you don’t cure it” (interview, September 2006). At a staff meeting the committee tried to get staff to share their experiences with bullying. Some staff offered examples of bullying situations, some staff turned it into a joke, and some staff chose not to participate. It was clear that this was a very sensitive subject and that the staff was going to need time to become more comfortable with the topic.

The committee persevered and continued to present staff with information regarding bullying. Staff who felt comfortable conducting class meetings shared their experiences and offered their advice. They also went through some of the grade-specific

lessons provided by the Health Department and allowed staff to become more familiar with them. Andrea admitted that by the end of the year, more staff was feeling comfortable with the initiative and the materials they were presenting, although, she felt there was still a long way to go because many were stuck in a routine and did not adjust well to change.

Andrea's advice to anyone interested in implementing an antibullying initiative is simple. "Jump in with both feet, provide sufficient training for all staff, and allow time for staff to get comfortable with the initiative (interview, September 2006). She would also caution bringing in parents too quickly. Andrea's school brought parents in before any real framework was put in place. Although the parents did help with the more administrative tasks, initially a lot of time was spent explaining the teacher jargon and their responsibilities to the parents. Andrea felt that the staff needed to come to an understanding about what constituted bullying and what the initiative was going to look like at their school before they brought the parents on board. Finally, Andrea would also want everyone to see how high bullying ranks on a violence continuum. Her thoughts and feeling regarding bullying were validated when she could actually see the severity of the issue. Bullying is a major concern facing our students, and something needs to be done to prevent it from occurring.

### **Lulu's Story**

Lulu has been teaching for 10 years. At the time of the interview she was a primary teacher and was no longer involved with an antibullying initiative. Lulu was involved with the initial "Good Kid Sid" pilot project. She spent 3 years with the initiative. Lulu's school was a medium-sized school. There were approximately 300

students from junior kindergarten to grade 6. The population was very diverse, with the majority of families coming from a low socioeconomic status. A few of the families fell into the medium socioeconomic status. Many of the parents did not speak English as their first language. Parental involvement with the school and the school's initiative was limited.

Prior to her involvement in the antibullying initiative, Lulu stated she was aware of bullying. "As an elementary student (kindergarten–grade 6), I knew that not everyone was treated the same. I was aware that certain kids were picked on. Sometimes you heard about what happened, and other times, you saw it" (interview, September 2006). Lulu could not recall if her teachers talked about bullying, however, she remembered a bullying incident from when she was in grade 6.

I watched as a boy in my class was teased by a bunch of students. It started out with one student teasing the boy; others joined in quickly. It happened in the classroom. He sat in the row next to me. There was a group of students surrounding his desk; some were teasing and some were just watching. The teacher wasn't in the room. I tried to ignore it, but it wasn't going away. I could have left and got a teacher, but instead, I joined in. It wasn't what I wanted to do, but I didn't want everyone to think I was on his side. I didn't want them to include me in the teasing. I can remember how horrible I felt, and I can only imagine how he was feeling. I tried to make it up to the boy, the next day by sharing my recess with him. He accepted the snack, and we spent recess together. Nothing ever transpired from the incident. There weren't any consequences to those who were doing the bullying, none of us got in trouble or were even spoken

to by the teacher. I wonder if the boy ever said anything to anyone, a teacher or his parents? I wonder how he is doing today (interview, September 2006).

That memory has stayed with her throughout her life. She said, "I share it with my students when we discuss bullying. I let them know how I took the easy way out of a difficult situation. I was in a position to stop the bullying from happening and I didn't!" (interview, September 2006). It's amazing to me that she still remembered how she felt after that incident. It proves just how powerful and everlasting bullying is. That memory was one of the reasons Lulu wanted to be a teacher. She knew that not everyone felt the same way she did about school. "I really enjoyed school!" (interview, September 2006).

It was at the end of Lulu's first full year as a contract teacher. She was new and was excited to be teaching. At a staff meeting late in the year, her principal announced that she had applied to be one of the schools to pilot an antibullying initiative in conjunction with the local Health Department. "I wanted to get involved and make a difference" (interview, September 2006). Lulu's principal was putting a committee together to begin looking at the initiative. "My hand went up straightaway. I thought being on this committee would be a great way to try and create that community that I had dreamt of when I was becoming a teacher" (interview, September 2006).

Lulu found the first year of the initiative difficult. The schools involved were not following a preset program; the goal was to create an antibullying framework that would suit their school, their students, and their community. The common thread that would run throughout all of the pilot schools was that bullying would not be tolerated. "I remember a lot of meetings, long meetings. I remember talking a lot about incidents that occurred in the past. We seemed to always end up debating what really constituted bullying"

(interview, September 2006). In her second year, the committee shrank in size, and she experienced a change in administration. The new administration supported the initiative. “Our meetings had a purpose and a definite end time, and the whole school heard the same message, bullying was not going to be tolerated” (interview, September 2006). Her initiative moved slowly. “As a committee, we agreed on what bullying was and we made sure our staff and students knew how to identify it” (interview, September 2006). Lulu felt whole-school assemblies were an effective way to share information regarding bullying, because they would ensure everyone, staff and students, heard the same message, even those who were resistant to the initiative. “We had a number of staff who didn’t seem to think bullying was important. Our principal said that over time they would begin to believe our message” (interview, September 2006).

Assemblies became a regular occurrence at Lulu’s school. Every second week the school would gather in the gymnasium. “Our students looked forward to our assemblies, and more staff got involved in the skits as the year progressed” (interview, September 2006). The content of their assemblies evolved from showing what bullying looked like to what to do when you see it occurring. A “gotcha” award was implemented. When students were caught doing the “right” thing, they were given a slip of paper that was entered into a draw. At assemblies a number of tickets were drawn and those students were rewarded for their good choices.

Lulu’s staff had been tracking incidents of bullying. “It [tracking] created more work for us, but we could clearly see who our repeat offenders were and who we needed to look out for” (interview, September 2006). Her staff also began to implement class

meetings. “The meetings allowed us to have students share their feelings and work at solving problems in a safe and protected environment” (interview, September 2006).

By her third year the language surrounding bullying was in place. Lulu claimed her students could identify bullying, they knew how they could intervene, and students were even starting to intervene. “Our incidents of bullying decreased and the atmosphere of the school was more positive” (interview, September 2006)! When asked about parental involvement, Lulu said they were “slowly being included into the plan” (interview, September 2006). Initially parents received information in the school newsletter. There was always an open invitation to attend the assemblies and see what was happening in the school.

The main accomplishment was the creation of the common language. This common language allowed staff and students to talk about problems they were facing and how they were going to deal with them. Students were given the power and the tools to intervene on the playground and prevent incidents from occurring in positive ways that didn’t involve fighting. The staff was also more confident when identifying bullying.

“Time!” (interview, September 2006) was stated as the major challenge facing her school. She said it was difficult to fit bimonthly whole-school assemblies and weekly class meetings into an already-full schedule. “Our principal insisted on class meetings being included on our timetable, but this meant that one of our subjects was losing a bit of teaching time” (interview, September 2006). The committee met weekly to keep the initiative on track, as well as extra meetings for those involved in the skits. Tracking bullying incidents, displaying all of the gotchas collected, and creating displays that promoted the common language and the messages about bullying all require time.



A second challenge was convincing her staff that this antibullying initiative was important. Bullying affects students and how they feel about being in school. “We needed to convince our staff that this was not just a phase, that bullying would not go away until we choose to address it” (interview, September 2006). New initiatives are always being introduced to schools, and staffs have to decide which ones they can take on and which ones they have to set aside. This pilot project was introduced at the same time that changes were being introduced into the language curriculum. Bullying is a difficult subject, and Lulu learned very quickly that people have definite opinions about it. Some people are eager to get on board with new initiatives, and others remain very resistant. A lot of time was spent agreeing on what bullying was and how it was going to be handled. “I would say that it took the 3 years for us to come to a place where we were all comfortable with the initiative” (interview, September 2006).

When asked what the greatest change was, Lulu replied it was their students. “Instead of using their fists to handle problems or running to teachers and tattling on one another, our students had the tools to solve a lot of their own problems” (interview, September 2006). She was quick to point out that the students also knew when they had to involve a teacher. She described them as confident and aware that they could intervene and prevent a situation from escalating. “Our students were more self-assured and more respectful” (interview, September 2006).

Lulu’s advice to anyone looking to start an antibullying initiative was simple. She felt the effects of bullying were devastating, and as teachers, it is our job to ensure every student is safe. She stated, “teachers needed training to understand what constitutes

bullying” and that “antibullying initiatives take time, a lot of time and the support of your administration is invaluable” (interview, September 2006).

### **Findings in Relation to Research Questions**

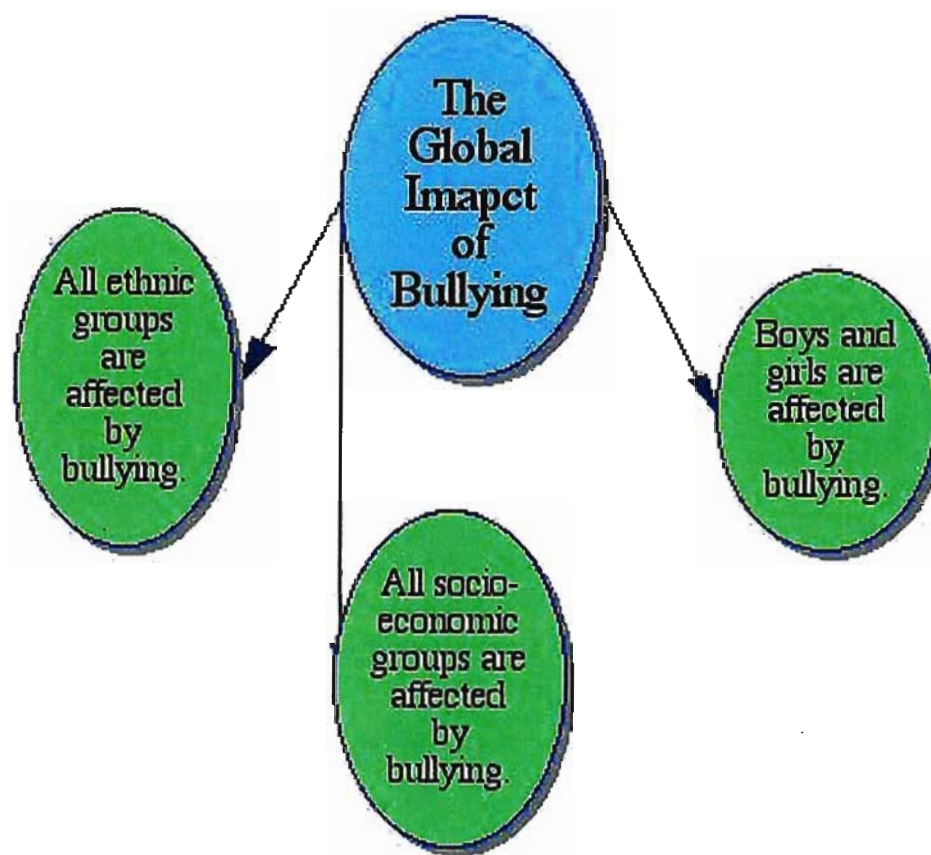
Five main questions guided my research. Each question will be addressed in relation to my findings. The first question I asked was, Who is impacted by bullying? See Figure 1 for an overview of the findings.

Although none of my participants directly answered this question, their stories and experiences support the notion that bullying is a global issue that affects males and females, varying ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. The 5 teachers that participated in this research represented schools with and without multicultural diversity and schools with varied socioeconomic statuses. Regardless of the make-up of each school site, each of the five schools was affected by bullying.

The second question I asked was, What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the phenomenon of bullying? See Figure 2 for an overview of the findings.

Four out of 5 of my participants were aware of bullying prior to beginning their antibullying initiative. Natalie, Andrea, and Lulu shared a personal connection to the bullying phenomenon. William however, admitted that he initially believed the myths surrounding bullying. “I thought bullying was just a reality of growing up” (interview, August 2006).

Of even greater interest, though, was the fact that all 5 participants spoke of reservations on the part of some of their staff regarding the need for an antibullying initiative. Some of Skippy’s staff did not like the negative association that arose from their participation in an antibullying initiative. Natalie had a few staff question the



*Figure 1.* The global impact of bullying.

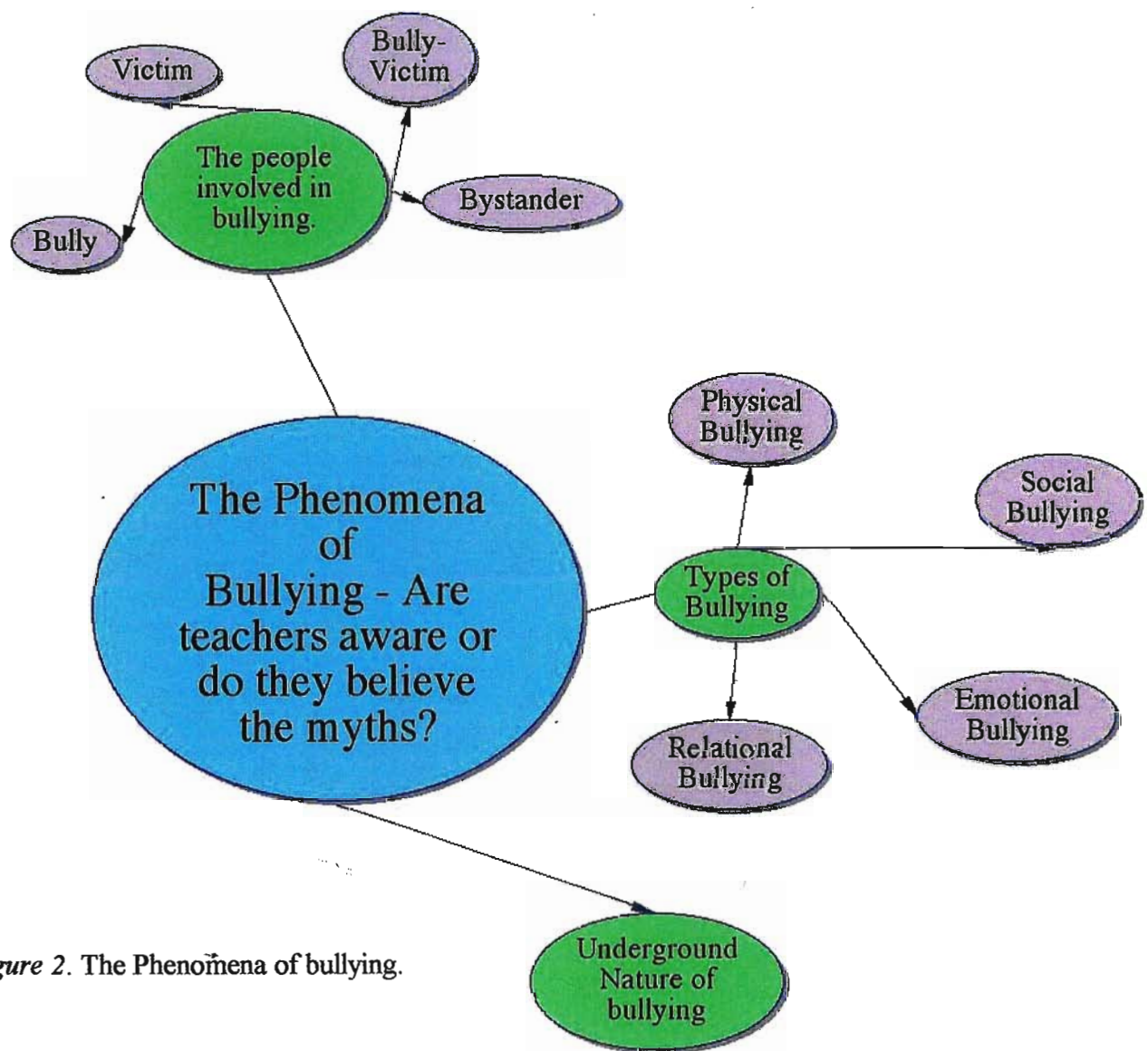


Figure 2. The Phenomena of bullying.

necessity of the training after the program had been in place for a couple of years.

William had staff state antibullying programs were necessary, just not for them at their school. Andrea shared that some staff were uncomfortable when talking about bullying and resorted to jokes. And finally, Lulu felt it took 3 years before her entire staff was on board and accepting of their antibullying initiative.

The third question I asked was 'What are teachers' experiences with curricular expectations and implementing antibullying initiatives?' See Figure 3 for an overview of the findings..

The answer to this question, echoed repeatedly by each participant, was the need for time! Time, they felt, was essential to any antibullying initiative. Time was needed to build an awareness of bullying and all that it entails and to create a common language for staff and students to use when discussing bullying. Each school commented on the importance of this, but it did not happen overnight. Students and even staff needed convincing that antibullying initiatives were necessary. Whole-school assemblies were an invaluable tool used regularly by Skippy and Lulu. This was in fact where the common language was put in place. Guest speakers were also utilized to ensure all received a common message, and they also created a starting place for conversations regarding bullying. Conducting class meetings was incorporated by 4 of the participants. The teachers in this study felt that class meetings were a time to check in with their students and discuss any issues that had surfaced. Class meetings, however, are not a part of our timetable. Teachers need time to fit this into an already busy schedule. Creating covenants/agreements, class cheers, awards, newsletters, and celebrating student successes means time away from the curriculum. Committees needed time to track

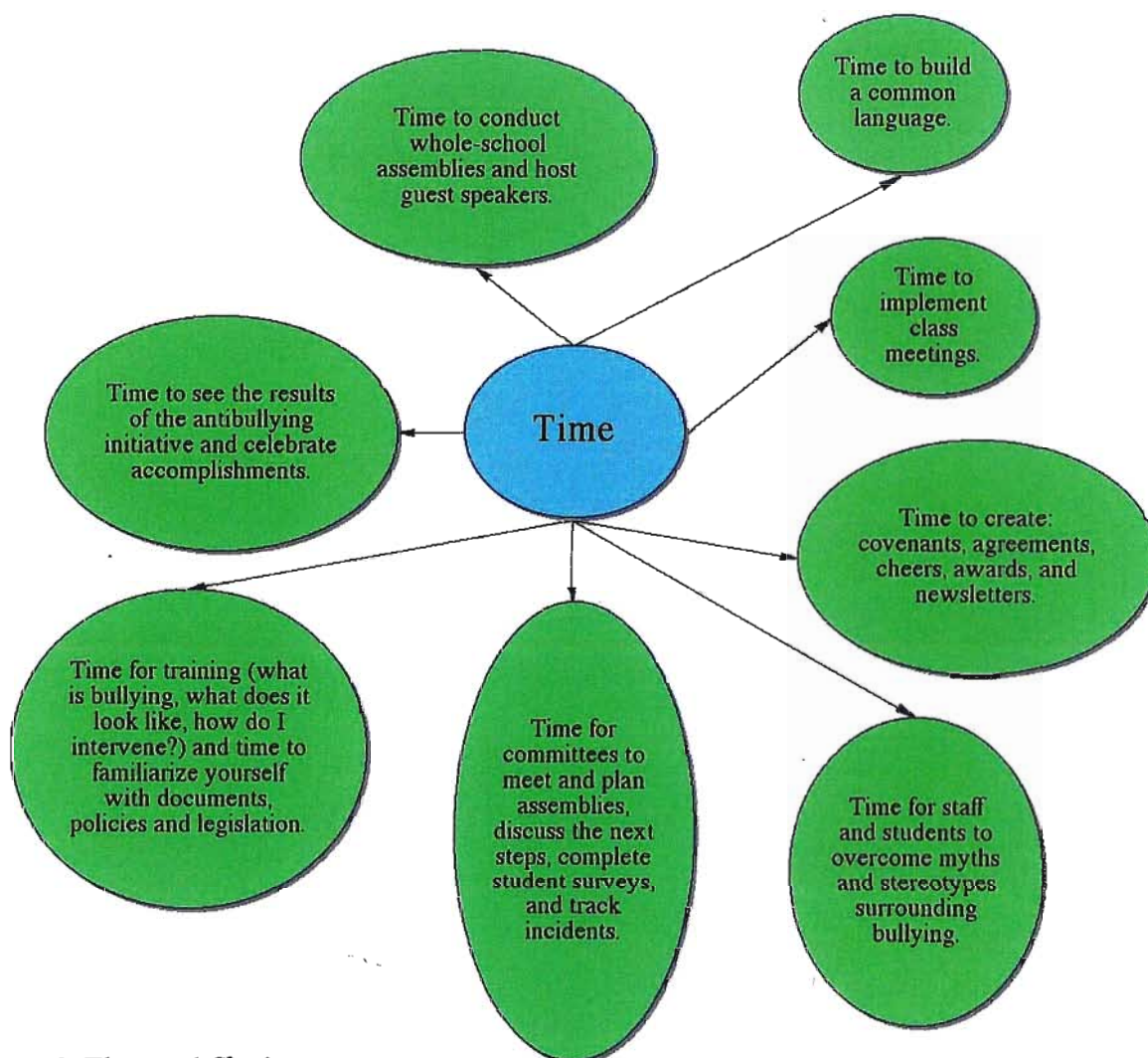


Figure 3. The need for time.

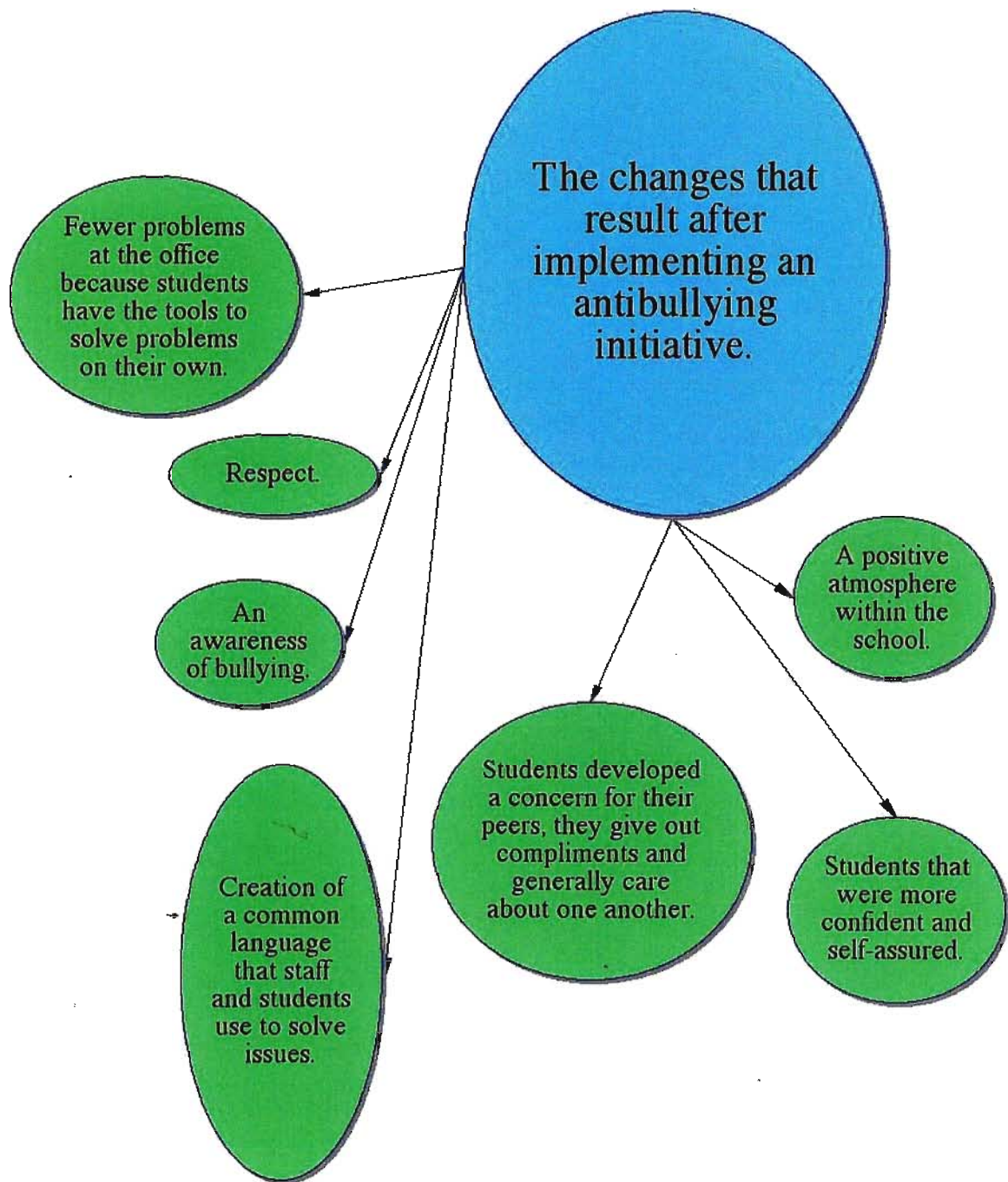
incidents, go through the “Imagine” document, and prepare lessons and assemblies, and the time required varied greatly from school to school. Skippy’s committee met weekly for a couple of hours, Natalie’s met once a month, and at the time of the interview William was the sole participant on his committee. Time is also needed for staff to receive the required training and to update new staff as they arrive, and come to understand the importance of antibullying initiatives. Each of the 5 teachers interviewed supported their initiative and felt it was making a difference in their schools. Finally, time is needed for results to be seen. Real change does not happen quickly. “It took a couple of years to really take off” (interview, July 2006). But once it was ingrained in the culture, “we started to notice far fewer problems out on the schoolyard” (interview, July 2006).

The fourth question I asked was What are teachers’ thoughts on the changes antibullying initiatives make in our schools?’ See Figure 4 for an overview of the findings.

First and foremost, fewer problems were ending up at the office. Students were gaining the tools needed to handle some of their problems on their own. They became aware of bullying and started to show a concern for their peers by giving compliments and caring about one another. Andrea (September 2006) said her kids “stood taller.” Lulu commented on the positive change in the general atmosphere and in their students. “Our students were more self-assured and more respectful” (interview, September 2006).

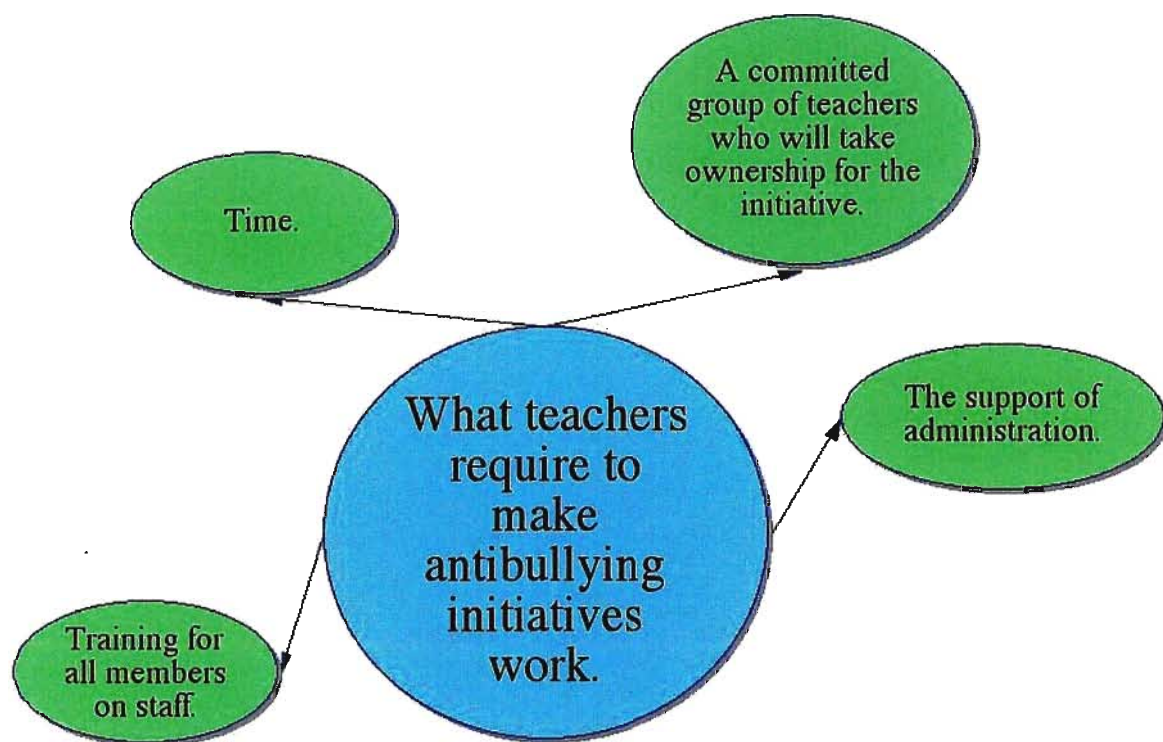
The final question I asked was What do teachers want or need to learn in order to address the issue of bullying and victimization? See Figure 5 for an overview of the findings.





*Figure 4.* Changes after implementing an antibullying initiative.





*Figure 5.* Requirements for antibullying initiatives to work.

Surprisingly enough, this list is quite small. The commitment of time was a priority. The support of their administration was also important. Training was provided to only a few members, so all felt training was required to convince people of the need for an antibullying initiative. But the greatest need of all was the commitment of a core group of people to make this happen. "It is all about commitment. If people are committed and on board, you could do it once a month. It's not about the assemblies, it's about the people" (interview, June 2006).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary school teachers' lived experiences and perceptions surrounding the implementation of an antibullying program within the public school system. In this chapter, Skippy spoke passionately about the need for children to feel safe while at school. His commitment to the initiative and his desire to make staff and students aware of bullying and its effects were reflected in his story. Natalie, aware of the issue, was amazed at the levels of bullying that students reported. William, a relatively new teacher, was excited to be a part of the initiative but unsure how to convince a resistant staff that an antibullying initiative was needed at their school. Andrea's perspective on bullying was twofold. She first experienced it on a personal level and then from the perspective of a teacher. Initially she thought schools did not do enough to support victims, but when the tables were turned and she was in the role of the teacher, she felt there was never time to do enough. Lulu remembered the unfair treatment of one of her classmates and uses this story to help her students understand the choices they must make when facing bullying. She hopes she can provide her students with a safe environment and the tools to make them successful

throughout their lives. Five research questions were posed in Chapter One. The answers to these questions were uncovered as my participants' stories and experiences were explored. See figure 6 for an overview of all of their findings.

Chapter Five will connect the experiences of the participants to the current research on bullying. It will describe implications for practice and for theory and will make recommendations for the future. This research has shown bullying is a problem affecting our schools, and our teachers need to be part of the solution.

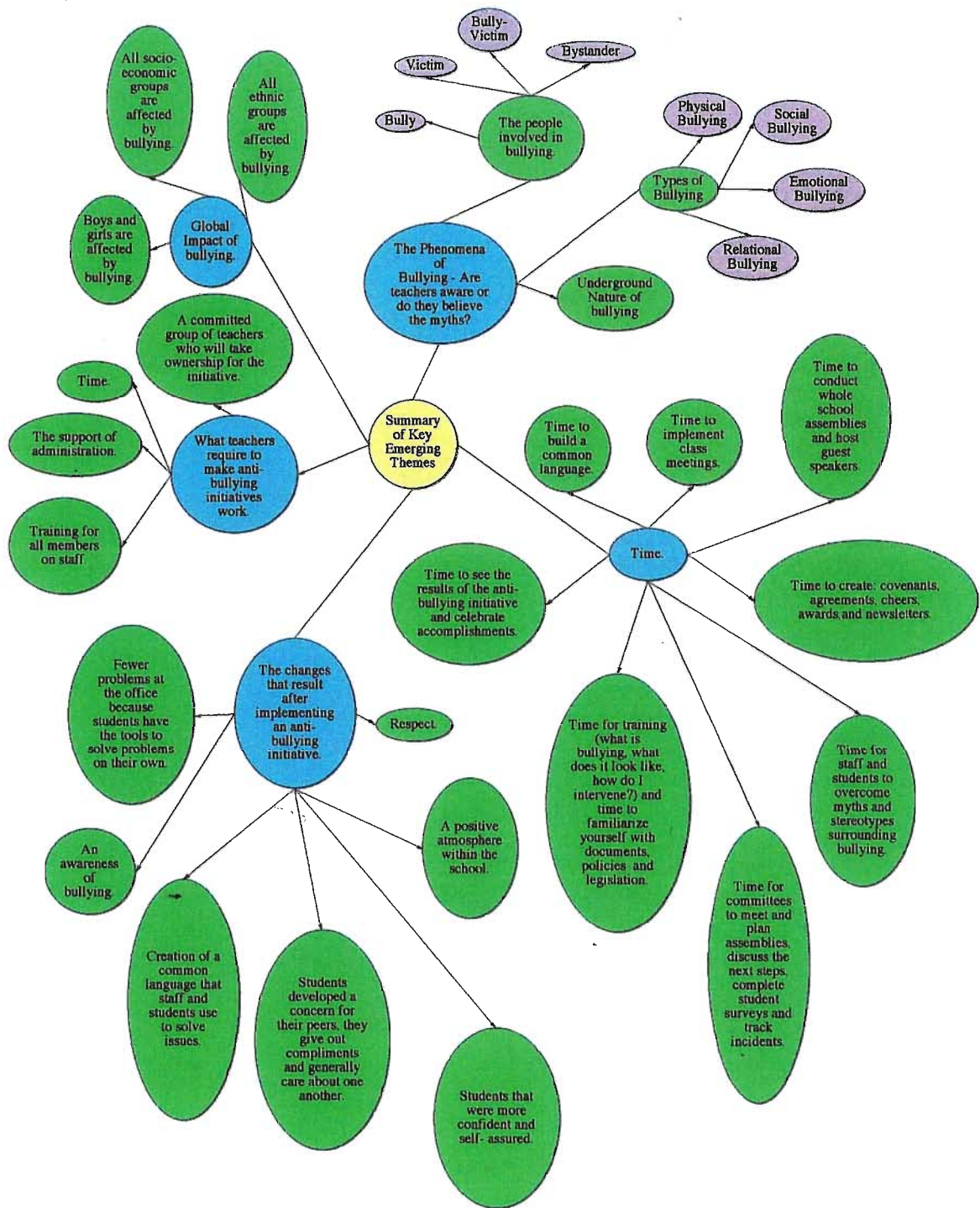


Figure 6. Summary of key findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

*It has been 5 years since the "Good Kid Sid" antibullying pilot program ended. I have changed schools. My current school does not have an explicit antibullying program in place. We use "The Eight Keys": ownership, flexibility, balance, integrity, speak with good purpose, failure leads to success, commitment, and this is it. Through whole-school assemblies (that acknowledge students who use the keys successfully) and classroom discussions, our students are made aware of the "keys" and how they should be incorporating them into their lives. The staff did not receive a lot of training around the initiative. We devote some of our staff meeting time to "the keys", but it is mainly to update staff on assembly times and what key will be the focus for the month. The strength of the initiative is really up to each individual teacher and the amount of time they dedicate to each key. Our timetables are filled with curriculum expectations; it is up to the teacher to incorporate the "keys" into their lessons or set aside time to make students aware of their importance. Depending on the make-up of your class, the added responsibilities that some teachers assume and the value placed on "The Eight Keys," this can become a difficult task.*

*Addressing the issue of bullying and victimization, making staff and students aware of what it is, what it looks like, and what to do when you see it occurring, has never been a school priority, even though we have data that suggest it exists. I can remember a staff meeting where we were going over the student survey responses (students in grade 4 complete a survey about feeling safe and bullying). Some staff disputed the results; they did not agree with the students and their perceptions of bullying at our school. I was frustrated. It took 3 years for my previous staff to come to an*

*understanding about the pervasiveness of bullying and how harmful it can be, and now I was at another school that questioned the validity of bullying and whether or not it truly was a concern. How long will it be until an antibullying initiative is put in place here?*

*I understand their hesitation. On the surface, it does not appear that we have a bullying problem. Unlike my first school, there are very few physical problems, and we do not have a reputation for being a rough school. If the staff were not listening closely to conversations and asking students how they were feeling, how would they know bullying is happening? Why would a group of teachers take time away from curriculum, especially when the government is putting a lot of pressure on schools to improve their test scores, to focus on a problem they do not believe exists? If the staff is unaware of what to look for and have limited to no experience with bullying, how can they address the problem? When will antibullying initiatives and Nel Noddings's (2003) notion of caring in schools become a priority?*

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This final chapter will provide a summary of my key findings, making connections to previous research on bullying. It will focus on the implications for practice and theory of antibullying initiatives, specifically the "Imagine...A School Without Bullying" initiative, and highlight my recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore 5 elementary school teachers' lived experiences and perceptions as they implemented an antibullying program in their respective schools. All 5 teachers worked within the public school system in southern Ontario, Canada. Each teacher, 2 males and 3 females, worked at a school that was involved with the "Imagine...A School Without Bullying" program or its

predecessor, “Good Kid Sid”; both were joint initiatives between the school board and the local Health Department. Their stories described what the initiative looked like at their respective school, their successes and challenges, and finally advice they would share with others who decide to embark on an antibullying initiative. From their experiences and stories, emerging themes were uncovered: an awareness of the phenomenon of bullying or lack thereof, and the acceptance or denial of myths that surround bullying, an overwhelming need for time, changes that were seen as a result of the initiative, and finally, what they felt was required to sustain an antibullying initiative. These key themes will be discussed throughout the remainder of this paper.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The phenomenon of bullying has been written about extensively, yet it continues to control our school environments. Do we, as a society, not care about what happens to our children, or are we uninformed regarding the long-lasting and potentially devastating effects of bullying? This research suggested the latter is true. Although 4 out of 5 of my participants were aware of bullying before embarking on their antibullying initiatives, William regretfully admitted that prior to his involvement in the “Imagine” program he believed the myths surrounding bullying to be true (interview, August 2006). Marini et al., 1999 stressed the need for teachers to hear the information surrounding bullying so they can unlearn myths they may believe to be true. Ross (1998) stated that teachers revert to myths to explain their perceptions of bullying. Overcoming personal perceptions of the bullying phenomenon and how it is dealt with was something that Andrea, a former victim of bullying, had to conquer (interview, September 2006). Andrea once believed teachers did not do enough to help victims of bullying; now, a

teacher, she was faced with the daunting task of dealing with bullying and covering a tremendous number of curriculum expectations (interview, September 2006). Without proper training and time, these tasks, as experienced by Andrea, become increasingly difficult.

Bullying, a problem that has been discussed since the mid-19th century (Rigby et al., 2004) was brought to the forefront in the early '80s by Olweus after the suicide of three young boys as a result of bullying (Olweus, 1993). The tragedies did not stop there. Many children have lost their lives due to bullying, and others continue to live in fear. More than 2 decades have passed, and bullying continues to affect our students. Pepler (2006) reported that Canadian statistics regarding bullying and victimization remain quite high. In their playground observations, Craig and Pepler discovered that teachers often overlook bullying happening right in front of them (Craig et al., 2000). William stated that some of his staff did not believe bullying was a problem at their school (interview, August 2006). William was not alone. All 5 participants shared that some staff were hesitant to implement an antibullying initiative. Current research supports this thinking. Smith et al. (2005) report that teachers and parents are still not convinced of the seriousness of bullying and victimization in schools today. Teachers do not have enough information on the phenomena of bullying. Training was provided to only a limited number of participants when their schools enrolled in the "Imagine" program. There is a clear need for all teachers to be trained in addressing bullying and victimization with their students. The experiences shared within this paper will enrich the current research on bullying by providing an often neglected teachers' perspective on the issue (Beran, 2005; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005).



The second key finding in this research was the notion of time. In an overwhelming response, the participants of this research felt time was a major hurdle in the implementation of an antibullying initiative while continuing to address all aspects of the curriculum. Olweus and Limber (1999) report that teachers must support an antibullying initiative or the need to change the school climate if the program is to be successful. However, from the stories shared in this research, we know that teachers do not readily jump on board with new initiatives. Lulu said it took 3 years of working with the antibullying initiative at her school before she felt all staff supported and believed in the project (interview, September 2006). I believe the hesitation of teachers in regards to antibullying initiatives is due to a lack of understanding. I knew I had to be involved in antibullying initiatives when I returned from the Fear and Loathing Conference held in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (2002). It was after hearing the personal stories of bullying that the research came alive. William alluded to a similar energy about his “Imagine” initiative after hearing the presentation from his local Health Department (interview, August 2006). Beran (2005) supports teacher training in regards to bullying and states that teachers need to believe they can deal with bullying. Time is money, or so the saying goes, and only a few staff members are released to attend training sessions. How can teachers become inspired and eager to prevent bullying if they are not able to hear the information for themselves?

The creation of a school policy on bullying sends a clear message to the community that this school will not tolerate bullying (Rigby, 1998). It is also mandatory according to new legislation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The Ontario Ministry of Education and its *Safe Schools Strategy Training* document is the most

current document containing information on bullying and how it will be handled in schools. Schools received a safe@school CD ROM. This CD ROM contains e-learning modules and current research in the field of bullying. However, not all teachers were trained or given time to familiarize themselves with the information. Teachers need to believe they can be effective when dealing with bullying if programs are going to work (Beran, 2005), yet training is not provided for everyone. When will all teachers receive the necessary training?

Bronfenbrenner reported children needed positive relationships with family, teachers, and peers in order to thrive, and the best way to prevent children from antisocial behaviours was to involve positive adults in their lives and teach them to problem solve (Brendtro, 2006). Pepler's (2006) research echoes Bronfenbrenner's belief in positive relationships. Pepler's perceptions regarding bullying have evolved over the years. Bullying can be viewed through binoculars, one lens focused on the participants and the other focused on the relationships (Pepler). Pepler views bullying as a relationship problem and therefore sees the need for a relationship solution. A combination of scaffolding (providing a child with support until it is no longer needed) and social architecture (promoting positive relationships and examining negative ones) will help in preventing bullying (Pepler). In creating positive relationships, Bosacki et al. (2006) report on the importance of moral values in bullying intervention. Teaching children about positive character traits (empathy, kindness) and creating a respect for differences will help to strengthen the positive bonds between students. However, None of the above can be achieved without time.

The notion of fostering positive relationships and a positive climate leads me to the third key finding. "I think the biggest lesson [that I learned] is that antibullying programs really work!" (interview, July 2006). All 5 of the participants experienced positive change as a result of their initiative. Fewer problems were seen at the office, and students had the tools to deal with problems (interview, June 2006). Lulu talked about the increase in the confidence and respect of her students (interview, September 2006). Creating happy students is one thing, but skeptics will want to know about academics. Depression and anger (symptoms of victimizations) will prevent students from learning (Gibbs, 1995). Buhs et al. (2006) and Hoglund (2007) agree that by preventing students from disengaging from school activities (victimization in the form of peer abuse and exclusion will cause disengagement), we will achieve academic success. If antibullying initiatives can foster happy and successful students, we would be able to achieve Noddings's (1993) notion of caring in schools.

The final theme to emerge from this research was, what is needed to make antibullying initiatives commonplace in our schools? Teachers play a critical role in bullying prevention (Boulton, 1997; Holt & Keyes, 2004; Nicolaides et al., 2002). New teachers are not receiving adequate training when it comes to bullying prevention (Nicolaides et al.). In fact the teachers in this research would say that all teachers need training with respect to bullying and victimization. The teachers in this research felt adequate training was a necessity to implement an antibullying initiative. The most important requirement was a committed group of teachers that would take ownership of the initiative. Believing you can make a difference in bullying will allow you to succeed

(Beran, 2005). The final need was time. This will be an area of concern for future research. How do we find the time to make bully free schools a reality?

### **Implications for Practice**

The teachers in this study shared stories about positive changes seen in the staff and students at their respective schools. The degree of change seemed to correlate to the length of time the school had devoted to the initiative. It took 3 years for Lulu's staff to become aware of the issue and accept a role in preparing their students with the necessary tools to deal with bullying. Students were more respectful, and they had the tools to handle problems more effectively when they arose. Skippy's school decreased the number of incidents being referred to the office. Natalie was shocked by the pervasiveness of bullying in her school. She was unaware of the magnitude of the problem until her school became involved with the "Imagine" initiative. William admitted that he believed some of the myths that surrounded bullying until he attended the training sessions. His involvement with the initiative provided him with more knowledge surrounding bullying: knowledge that he now imparts to his students. Andrea saw an increase in the confidence in her students when they were armed with the knowledge that they have the power to make a difference. All of these changes occurred because these schools took the time to become aware of the problem of bullying and they took the time to do something about the bullying that was occurring at their schools. Time was the overriding key theme in this research. The 5 teachers in this study reported that time was needed to build a common language (Skippy). Time was needed to conduct class meetings (William; Andrea). Finally, time was needed to celebrate school successes (Skippy; Natalie).

Although this study cannot measure a numerical change in bullying rates, it does report changes that were witnessed by each of the teachers. It is worth noting that all of the schools, regardless of their size, socioeconomic status, and diversity, saw a positive change in their staff and or students after implementing the antibullying initiative. This addresses the idea that bullying has a global impact. Bullying is a problem that is seen all around the world (Rigby, 1998), and it is a problem that affects both male and female students (Charach et al., 1995; Grotzinger & Crick, 1996; Hoglund, 2007).

The validity of this research comes by way of member checking (Creswell, 2002). As discussed in Chapter Three, Creswell stated participants check the researcher's account of their experiences for accuracy. Members were asked to read transcripts of their stories and verify that I represented their stories accurately. All members received their transcripts. No content changes were necessary. Andrea commented on a few grammatical errors. The use of direct quotations from my participants also allows their voices to be heard.

A challenge that was experienced by each teacher was gaining the support for the initiative from all of his or her colleagues. Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) and Boulton (1997) found that the level of understanding that the teacher has in regards to bullying determine how they respond. If teachers are unaware of the complex nature of bullying, they may not see it as a problem. Skippy found that some of his colleagues were hesitant about participating in an antibullying initiative because of the negative connotations associated with bullying (interview, June 2006), and William stated some of his staff did not feel bullying was a problem at their school (interview, August 2006). In both cases some staff believed they were at a "nice" school that did not need an antibullying

initiative. Mishna et al. (2005) echoed this sentiment in their research; they found the premise of a nice school might mask the underlying problems. We know, from Marini et al. (1999), that bullying is covert, and unless it is reported or you know what to look for, it will be difficult to spot. This reiterates the need for all teachers to receive training in regards to bullying and all that it encompasses.

Teachers were once students themselves, and they continue to be lifelong learners. Teachers have their own preconceptions about bullying. Without proper education regarding bullying, teachers may be compounding the problem. "When school adults ignore, trivialize, or tolerate bullying incidents the victims internalize the implied message that the adults have discounted their worth as individuals, and they carry this message forward into adulthood" (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997, p.316). Research states that teachers want information regarding the nature of bullying, how to identify an incident as bullying, and how to address the problem when it occurs (Beran, 2005; Mishna et al., 2005). Unfortunately, not a lot of training has been provided. I wonder if our students would feel safer if all teachers were provided with adequate training in regards to bullying? Would the statistics that Pepler (2006) reported decline if teachers knew how to recognize and intervene in bullying situations? The new legislation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) states that teachers will receive training and that training will be ongoing to support new members.

Providing training for teachers, which Beran (2005), Holt and Keyes (2004), Nicolaides et al. (2002), and Boulton (1997) support, leads to another challenge that was discussed in every interview in this study. Each teacher stressed the need for more time: time to discuss bullying as a staff, time to share the information with the students, time to

discuss what the students have to say about how they are feeling, time to reflect on the initiative and decide what next steps need to be taken. The problem that I found when I was implementing the antibullying initiative was trying to find the time to address bullying along with all of my curriculum expectations. There are aspects of the curriculum that address bullying, but they represent such a minimal percentage of the overall curriculum that there is not enough time to cover what is necessary. Some members of Natalie's staff echoed this sentiment (interview, July 2006); they resented giving up time that could be spent addressing curriculum needs when bullying issues were addressed in previous grades. Mishna et al.'s (2005) research states that teachers found the demands of the curriculum and the demands of dealing with bullying incidents overwhelming. With pressures to improve test scores, some teachers find it difficult to take time away from the curriculum to address problems, especially if these problems happen outside where they did not witness them. "Some of the teachers, especially our grades 5 and 6 teachers, were not happy about having to take time away from other curriculum areas" (interview, July 2006).

Some teachers may be receiving mixed messages. We are being told that test scores must improve (Ontario Ministry of Education website). We are also being told that children need to be safe when they are at school. This message is supported by the new legislation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Can we have both? Can students improve their test scores and be safe at the same time? Can teachers meet all of the curriculum demands within a school year and address the issues surrounding bullying and victimization? Does one need (academic excellence) outweigh the other (safety)? Bronfenbrenner believed family, schools, and peers have to all work together to cultivate

positive outcomes in a child's behaviour (Brendtro, 2006). As these relationships change, so does the child. In order to maintain a healthy ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1961), strong relationships with parents, teachers, and peers must be present; students must excel academically, and they must feel accepted by their peers.

### **Implications for Theory**

Bronfenbrenner was a pioneer in the study of child behaviour who conducted his research in the natural settings of his participants (Brendtro, 2006). Teachers are also in a position to view children in their natural settings. Teachers see children working in whole group, small group, partner, and individual settings. Teachers have the opportunity to view the relationships children have with their peers and other members of the school community. Teachers, especially those of primary-aged students, have the opportunity to hear about the relationships student have with their families.

Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development was built around relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The ecology of human development is a series of interconnected relationships that influence child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The most important relationships in the lives of children are those closest to them. Parents, teachers, and peers form the relationships that have the power to influence child development (Bronfenbrenner). Positive relationships lead to a healthy ecology, whereas negative relationships have the opposite effect (Bronfenbrenner). The relationships between teacher and parent will also affect development. This relationship is unlike others; parents do not choose teachers; they are assigned to each other (Keyes, 2002). If values or beliefs differ and respect is not achieved this potentially negative relationship could affect the development of a child



(Keyes, 2002). Would differing values among staff or between a principal and a teacher affect the positive growth of a child? This research reported that teachers feel the support of administration when implementing antibullying initiatives is crucial. If the values shared between administration and the staff are not similar, or at least respected, will the students suffer? As smaller schools close and new schools increase in size, are we creating scenarios where values and beliefs will differ? Our schools are becoming more diverse. Are values universal? It is not easy for teachers to change schools, and students must attend schools in the area where they reside. Are we increasing the opportunity for the development of negative ecologies, thus preventing positive growth for our children? Is the design or make-up of our schools partially responsible for the bullying and victimization that occur there? Is this what is preventing the elimination of bullying and other antisocial behaviors?

Bandura (2001) studied social cognitive theory and examined the intentional acts of individuals and how they affected their personal growth. The manner in which people behave is affected by their moral and social values. Moral and social values help to regulate your actions, and they tend to remain stable for longer periods of time (Bandura). People can decide to selectively disengage from their moral values if they perceive their goal to be more important than the potential consequences (Bandura). A bully might be able to justify his or her actions if the outcome has personal benefits.

Bandura (2001) reported that motivation in achieving goals is essential in a participant staying on course and seeing his or her action to completion. Antibullying initiatives do not provide schools with immediate changes. In fact, participants in this research stated that it took a while for changes to be seen. How can we motivate teachers

and students to continue to devote time to antibullying initiatives when they are not being rewarded for their actions?

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

According to some teachers, schools have become very focused on improving test scores. Some teachers are feeling pressure to meet all of the curriculum demands as well as attending to the individual needs and safety of their students. And violence continues to enter our schools. Do schools need to rethink the curriculum? Do character education and the teaching of moral issues such as caring, kindness, inclusion, empathy, and compassion deserve a spot next to the traditional subject areas? Bosacki et al. (2006) feel incorporating moral education into antibullying interventions is critical. Do universal definitions for kindness, inclusion, empathy, and compassion exist? For instance, would I define kindness in the same manner as one of my students or their parents? Pepler, Smith, and Rigby (2004) reported that not all teachers, parents and students agree that bullying intervention is necessary in schools. Is this still the case? And if so, how do we make bullying intervention and prevention a necessity in the minds of everyone? Future research needs to monitor how teachers, parents, and students interpret the phenomena of bullying. If parents do not see preventing bullying as important, this message will be transferred to their children and make the job of preventing bullying that much more difficult for the teacher.

As a teacher who implemented an antibullying initiative, I struggled with meeting all of my curriculum demands as well as devoting time to addressing bullying. My students needed to learn what bullying was, they needed to learn a way to describe how they were feeling, they needed tools to handle bullying when it happened, and they

needed time to discuss what was happening and how they were feeling. I believe my students need to feel safe in order to learn, but the curriculum does not allow time for this. Høglund (2007) and Buhs et al. (2006) both reported a relationship between victimization and school disengagement/achievement levels. Research needs to be conducted to find a balance between the academic needs and the social needs of our students. Teachers want their students to grow academically and socially. We need a curriculum that supports both.

“Research is lacking on teachers’ understanding of bullying and on factors that influence their views on intervention” (Mishna et al., 2005, p. 719). All teachers, not just preservice teachers need, to receive adequate training regarding bullying, the nature of bullying, identification, intervention, and prevention. Who is responsible for providing this training? Should it be up to each school, should each board be responsible, or is it the responsibility of the province? The *Safe School Strategy Training* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) provides us with answers to the questions. The board bears the responsibility for training teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education). However, the details of the training are not included in the document. What direction should the training take? Should training be made available to everyone? How effective is it to have four teachers look at bullying information and then pass on what they learn to the remaining staff? Future research needs to explore avenues where all teachers can receive the necessary training with respect to bullying and victimization.

### **Summary**

This qualitative case study explored 5 elementary school teachers’ lived experiences and perceptions surrounding the implementation of an antibullying program

within the public school system. Although bullying has existed in schools since the mid-19th century (Rigby et al., 2004) and inundated our media for the past decade, it continues to be a problem for our schools and our students. In fact, children have lost their lives as a result of bullying in schools. Yet bullying still does not command a sense of public urgency to put an end to the problem.

All 5 participants in this study stated some staff needed to be convinced an antibullying initiative was appropriate for their school. Research supports their findings. Pepler et al. (2004) reported that not all teachers, parents, and students agree that bullying intervention is necessary in schools. However, all 5 participants also stated that positive changes were seen in their students as a result of their antibullying initiative. The Ministry of Education has created a CD ROM (safe@school) to better inform teachers of the bullying phenomenon and what they can do to prevent it from happening. However, this is not enough. The participants in this study felt a supportive administration, a committed group of teachers who would take ownership for the initiative, training for all staff members, and time were needed if an antibullying initiative were to be successful.

Bronfenbrenner's idea of a healthy ecology (Brendtro, 2006) is achieved when a child experiences positive relationships with his/her family, teachers and peers. Healthy ecologies also allowed for academic success (Brendtro). Do teachers have the time and or the tools to create healthy ecologies for their students?

If we support the notion that our students need a safe learning environment in order to excel academically, should we not provide teachers with what they need to put an end to bullying? Or is the phenomenon of bullying an insurmountable problem?

### **Final Thoughts**

I decided bullying would be the focus for my Master of Education thesis because of my involvement with the Good Kid Sid antibullying initiative. From a practical perspective, the information I gathered would benefit my research as well as the initiative my school was involved with. I was surprised at how much I benefited personally from the experience. I believe my teaching has changed as a result of this journey.

The “Fear and Loathing Symposium on Bullying” held in Ottawa, Ontario (2002) opened my eyes to the reality of bullying. Parents spoke of the pain their children had to endure as a result of bullying. Some of the children spoke up and received help. Others did not, and now their parents have to tell their story for them. It was here that I realized the important role that I play as a teacher. I know that bullying is a societal problem, not just a school issue, but also my involvement and understanding were necessary. I do not want any of my students to suffer as others have.

I also heard researchers talk about their work. I know that knowledge is power, but I find reading journal articles daunting. However, hearing Olweus, Pepler, Craig, Bosacki, and Marini discuss their work was powerful. I wanted to read about their findings because they spoke with such passion. As a teacher I am often presented with research, but it is not often that I get to discuss it with the actual researcher. I appreciated the dialogue and the opportunity to ask questions. I wish as a teacher I had more opportunities to hear researchers present their work.

I believe antibullying initiatives can work under the right circumstances. Bullying is not an insurmountable problem! I had the support of my administration. They provided time for the staff to discuss the nature of bullying and come to an agreement

about what was acceptable behaviour and what was not. They also removed some of the curriculum pressures. I did not feel guilty when I devoted class time to a discussion on bullying or a class meeting. However, the most important element to the initiative was the teachers.

Teachers are a critical component to any antibullying initiative (Boulton, 1997; Holt & Keyes, 2004; Nicolaides et al., 2002;). We need to ensure teachers are aware of the issues surrounding bullying, what it looks like, and how to intervene. I wholeheartedly agree with Pepler et al.'s (2004) statement that not all teachers agree antibullying initiatives are essential in schools today. Teachers have not been properly trained. The Ministry of Education changed the legislation to recognize bullying but provided training to only a few members of each staff. I understand that money is a factor in this decision, but does money outweigh safety? When teachers are provided with the right tools, I believe our students will feel safer, and only then, we will start to see a decline in bullying.

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DATE: April 20, 2006

FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair  
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Sandra Bosacki, Education  
Christine Rhoda

FILE: 05-273 RHODA

TITLE: Bullying in Schools: Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences while Implementing an Anti-Bullying Initiative

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

**DECISION:** Accepted as clarified.

**Please Note:** typographical error in 15<sup>th</sup> bullet point on consent form - "reseat" should read "research".

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of April 20, 2006 to April 30, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application**.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form **Continuing Review/Final Report** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb